

SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

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August,
1952

SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

Volume
1
Number
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132 PAGES OF NEW STORIES — NO REPRINTS!

Feature Novels

- ALL THE ANSWERS** Rog Phillips 12
The ultomaton knew, but could they trust it?
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Suddenly Carson realized how they'd get him...



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Cover by Milton Luros, from "Silent Partner"
Interior illustrations by Kiemle, Luros, Murphy, and Poulton

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 1 Appleton Street, Holed February, May, August, and November, by CO-Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church the Act of March 3, 1979. Single copy 25c yearly subscas matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, August, 1952, publication \$1.00. Entire contents copyright 1952 by CO-LUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, Inc. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelopes to insure return if not accepted, and while reasonable care will be exercised in handling them, it is understood that they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in U.S.A.

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As I Was Saying . . .

THE IDEAL detective story, from the viewpoint of many mystery-lovers, is the clear-cut "whodunit", which combines a fascinating puzzle to the readers along with a solid story. Such a novel as Agatha Christie's deservedly-famous "Murder of Roger Ackroyd" is a good example. Since I'm a "Christie fan", in addition to other interests, I re-read this one recently, remembering the solution, and was double-fascinated to note how cleverly the author had dangled important clues before my nose constantly. True, at the very end, the detective, Hercule Poirot, came up with a few items which the reader had not been told; but none of these were crucial to the solution. They embellished the conclusion, but every important item the reader needed to deduce the identity of the culprit had been given.

There has been quite a bit of discussion about the possibilities for detective mysteries of this nature in science-fiction. Not necessarily murder-mysteries, but stories where a problem to be solved by means of deduction is an integral part of the story,

where the reader will supposedly be misled, and finally startled by the solution given at the end. Those who claim that it can't be done in science-fiction rest most of their case on the fact that, since the author isn't confined to the here-and-now, an unlimited number of *dei-ex-machina* can be dragged in at will.

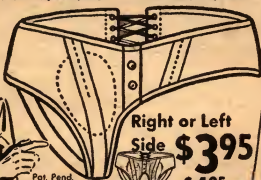
Can be. I must confess that I side with the ayes, because the fact that such can be done does not mean that it has to be. I see no reason why the science-fiction author, who wants to tackle a mystery-problem story, cannot play as fairly with the reader as the most skillful of present-day detective-story authors. It should be made clear at the start that a few of S. S. Van Dine's proposed "rules" for detective novels will be followed strictly. First of all, the "truth" should be apparent pretty much from the start, provided that the reader is sharp enough to see it (and a re-reading will show that this was this case); secondly, the "culprit" must be one who has played a major part in the story, and—if not above suspicion—

[Turn To Page 8]

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is apparently cleared for various reasons; third, some one person in the story must play the part of "detective"—and a "detective" is, among other things, one who detects. Action there can be, but the problem should be stated, evidence presented to the reader, and the solution announced, through ratiocinative processes, rather than violent persuasion.

The author, then, is free to paint the background picture as he likes, but once given, the story must follow its own basic logic. No little green men popping out of hats, unless little green men are clearly a part of the picture, and the reader knows that they are there, and likely to pop.

Rog Phillips' "All the Answers" isn't exactly this kind of story, but it does present a problem, bring forth evidence upon it, then offer a solution at the end. When I first read the story, I found the "mystery" a fascinating one; but after I finished, it struck me that his "solution" wasn't entirely flawless. Clever, I think you'll admit, but...

In regard to that "but", there were two choices open to me if I wanted to use the story. One was to send it back to Rog, with a note pointing out the flaw, and asking for different solution; the other was to let the story ride, as it was, and make it a contest story. The latter impulse won.

CONTEST

To the first reader—whether he or she be "fan", author, or just plain "reader"—who sends in a letter pointing out the flaw in Phillips' "solution", and shows what *kind* of an error it is, we will send, postpaid, the original cover from this issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*.

Just one hint: everything except the "solution" is to be taken for granted; we must accept Phillips' statements—through the actions and words of the characters—on the nature of the two contending civilizations, the particular situation con-

fronting them at the time, and the functioning of the machine in question. If you don't think a "brain" such as this *would* work as Rog describes, I'll be happy to see your arguments in the letter-department—but, so far as this contest is concerned, you'll have to take the author's word for it.

Now, for a few general rules, just to keep things in order.

1. Anyone is eligible to enter the contest—except, of course, employees of Columbia Publications, Inc., and/or members of their families. You may send in as many entries as you like.
2. Your letter will be considered, whether it's typewritten or hand-written, so long as I can read it at all.
3. The original goes to the *first* party sending in the correct answer; however, if there are others who also qualify, we'll use interior-illustration originals for consolation-prizes.
4. The contest closes July 15, 1952, and we'll announce the winner, and the correct answer, in our November issue.
5. In the unlikely event that no one gets the answer (which, remember, is not to figure out a "right" solution to the problem, but to point out the flaw in the one given in the story) we'll extend the contest for another issue.
6. I'll be the judge.

Oh, yes—naturally, contest-entries won't be considered as 1st-place (or anyplace) votes for "All the Answers" on my rating-sheet, unless you specify that you liked that story best.

Letters

NO SNIDE REMARKS

Dear Bob:

I've started this letter half a dozen times in the last month, only to be stopped by such drivelling nuisances as mumps and the urgent needs of the bank-account.

[Turn To Page 10]



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This time I think I'll make it. Anyhow, I have some stuff to get off my chest about this latest *Science Fiction Quarterly*, and get it off I will, come furnace-troubles, roof leaks, baby-screams, or lunch-time!

You're putting out an increasingly interesting magazine here. Frankly, I find it, each time, a bigger and better surprise after reading *Future*, where the effort seems to be considerably less. This comment does *not* apply to the lead novel, the Gibson affair, which I found entirely unreadable. The rest of the book was interesting, and comment-worthy.

I shall make no absolutely *no*, snide remarks about calling the deCamp story "Rogue Princess". After all, why shouldn't you capitalize on the Doubleday book? It's a *good* book. It's also a good story. Obviously, similar titles, don't indicate similar subject-matter. So I shall make no snide remarks.

Delighted, by the way, by the other piece of sleight-of-hand in the issue... Bat O'Hara and the Martian princess. More editors could afford to relax that way more often, and all the readers would have more fun. I hope you got dozens of happy letters about it, and will think up more such devices.

The MacLean piece, by itself, would have been enough. A very neat job of tightrope-walking, well-handled editorially. I wasn't sure myself, till half-way through, that Katherine was writing a story; the material ties in so well with so much of what she has said previously in all-out fiction efforts that I was sure she meant it, at least partly. I'm still sure of that, and very pleased with your blurb-treatment as well as with the story itself. Also surprise that some few readers took it as a "hoax." I guess it's just the conditioned-reflex reaction of a long-time stef reader...

Bat O'Hara, after he did get onstage, was no great surprise...not a good story, not bad. The Michael Sherman piece, however, I found thoughtful and thought-provoking, and well-written. Who is he? A new writer or a new name? Or just someone I've missed before?

I was also interested in the proposals made in the letter column by one Michael Mitchell...and wouldn't that be silly? What would be the fun of writing—or reading—science-fiction, if it weren't for the continual innovations in background? Someone recently defined a good stef story as the "experiences of an understandable

and believable character, faced with a credible and explicable problem, in a new and unfamiliar environment." Seems pretty sound to me. If I had to have all Martians a certain size and shape, speaking a certain language, and living a certain way, I might as well write westerns, where an infinite quantity of already-established factual background is readily available in the various public libraries. Why spend my time writing letters to other stef-authors through the pages of *Future* in order to set up such an established and limited background?

Mr. Mitchell's letter does suggest one useful notion, however... I'd love to have some semi-official source through which I could get permission to use another author's particularly clever ideas. Or maybe we could adopt a labeling-system, especially for future-on-Earth stories. I'd start with a notation: "Heinlein future" or "Leiber-future" or "prehistoric Taine" or "Judd Mars" or "Tenn Venus." This way, the author who first thought up the idea would get credit, and I could write the dozens of ideas I get when I read something set against a new and intriguing background.

Wigodsky's idea for a series is interesting, but I'd rather see one exploring possible other forms of life. Such a group would make a fine collection for a book, too.

And that's about it. The magazine *is* getting better all the time. A really good cover artist would make a difference, now...

—Judith Merrill

There's a bit of a story connected with the titling of Sprague's novelet, which, discerning readers may remember, was originally "The Saxon Pretender".

Now it came to pass that the voice of the Publisher came unto Lowndes as he labored over the cover of the February *Science Fiction Quarterly*, saying, "Let there be *sing* in the titles!"

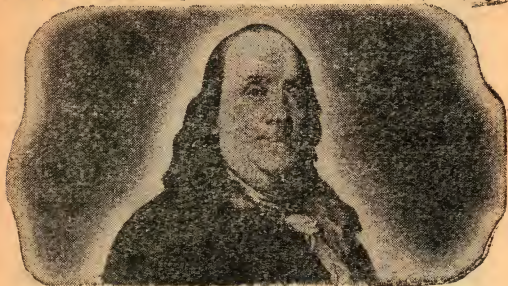
And Lowndes bowed unto the voice, then searched the titles before him, saying unto himself, "Verily, 'The Saxon Pretender' is a good title, and Sprague a worthy name for our cover, but does this title *sing*?"

So saying, he looked at the title, and, behold, it *singed* not, nor did it even yet *sang*; and Lowndes' heart was sad within him, and he said unto himself, "Yea, Sprague doth make his story *sing*, but when he is come to a title, the *sing* departeth from him."

Then another voice whispered saying, "Behold the very first scene in the story, wherein the hero doth encounter a naked

[Turn To Page 118]

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

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ALL THE ANSWERS

By Rog Phillips

If there was an answer to the riddle, a way by which the Council For Freedom could conquer the Federation, this ultomaton would know. But could Entor and his colleagues trust the answer? For the "brain's" first reply had been: Give the Federation the plans, so that they can make another ultomaton, just like me! And the second reply was: Let me handle all the details of a weapon!



ENTOR STOOD before the machine. "You can see me? Describe me."

The loudspeaker a few feet away remained silent for several seconds, then came to life. "From your clothes," it said, "it's obvious that you dressed in such a way that there could be no possibility of my description of you being faked. That patchwork cloak...odd-shaped pieces of colored

cloth sewn together. Turn around... That's fine. There are fifteen different shades, three pieces of each shade..."

"That's sufficient," Entor said. "No one but I and the man who made this know even that much about it." He took off the cloak and tossed it carelessly on a chair, and stood revealed as a man of sixty years, trim, athletic, with a bald head and rather pleasant features that did good job of concealing their faint lines of inflexibility.

Walking around the large desk he sat down, letting his arms rest on the glistening top, one finger idly circling

||||| Feature Novelet of Fate's Enigma |||||

a small white button recessed into the desk top in steady, slow motion. "Do you know what this button is for?"

"I've been informed of that," the loudspeaker said. "When a certain series of dots and dashes that you have practiced go over it, a bomb in a vital part of my physical structure can go off, destroying me."

"Right," Entor said. "I could destroy you at a mere whim; not only here, but wherever I might be. I carry a small pocket-radio with a similar button on it. If that is taken from me, or damaged, all I need do is go to any telephone and dial your destruction. In addition, there are several other ways I can bring about your instantaneous end that you will never learn of."

"I understand that perfectly," the loudspeaker replied.

"I fear you," Entor said. "Or rather— I recognize the fact that in bringing you into existence, I had to admit the greatest threat to my welfare that could ever exist. Even though you aren't alive, a machine, you have self-awareness and a desire to continue existing."

"That's true," the loudspeaker acknowledged. "I recognize the fact that no human can ever hope to equal me in thinking ability. I've read over two hundred million volumes of printed works; not only can quote every word, but I have assimilated meanings and implications and coordinated them. I have full-range experience of the human race's past, plus mature reflections of the finest minds on those experiences, plus science, plus my own ability to reason, imagine, and judge. I can even tell with reasonable certainty what will happen throughout humanity within the next few weeks."

"Yes, yes," Entor said curtly; "however, that's not what you were created for."

"No?" the loudspeaker said in surprised tones. "I was led to believe... but now I see. I was lead to believe that so that I would develop my

ability to foresee the potentialities of new factors you might consider introducing into the interplanetary complex of human relations."

"Correct," Entor said, his voice purring with satisfaction at having surprised the machine. "There are several things that have been kept from you—purposely. Before I tell you about them, however, I must exact your word that you will repeat them to no one; they must remain our secret."

"And because of the basic control built onto my complex," the loudspeaker responded, "once I give my word on that I will be incapable of breaking it. What if I refuse?"

Entor's finger started its circling movement around the button that could destroy the machine. "I hope you have the proper perspective as to your position," he said coldly. "Six months ago Project Mind began the initial setup that brought you into being. It could be repeated the second time in four months. Perhaps foolishly, I refused to impose a directive that would make you automatically obey me. Or perhaps wisely. I must at all times have the facts—not the mouthings of a yes-man complex."

The loudspeaker remained silent several seconds. Finally it said, "Very well; I give my word that I will keep secret certain specific things you wish to divulge to me. What are they?"

"Only one for the present," Entor said, exhaling a slow breath and relaxing. "That thing is this: you are to design for me an instrument, or tactful plan, or combination of instruments and tactical plans, that will make it possible for me to win a war against the Galactic Federation."

"I am to tell no one that that is your plan," the loudspeaker said. "I have given my word; but I haven't given my word that I would obey that order."

"Ah, but you will," Entor said, softly.

ENTOR STRODE imperiously to the large door. The guards on

either side of the closed door saluted respectfully; one of them opened it.

Immediately, the murmur of conversation inside stilled. Entor stepped inside, and the door closed behind him. He stood for a moment, stiffly erect, exuding inflexible strength, the living original of billions of portraits on the seven planets of the Free Alliance.

Then, abruptly, he relaxed, becoming an ordinary human being. Here in the inner sanctum of the Council for Freedom he could be himself.

"What now?" Lillis asked.

"We wait," Entor said. He grinned nervously at the short, thick-chested Lillis. "We wait."

With the grin remaining on his face he looked around at the others. Rial, Vanner, Gordon, Imray, and Kazam.

"So we wait," Imray said. "But what does the mechanical mind do?"

"It works out something for us," Entor said.

"Just like that?" Imray shrugged skeptically.

"Not quite," Entor said, dropping into a large overstuffed chair and stretching out his legs. "It goes something like this...it will work on a problem that can be roughly stated as: to find a plan which will seem to me certain to result in victory, but which will certainly result in my defeat."

"That's what I was saying!" Gordon exploded. "You should have ordered directives implanted that would prevent that from taking place."

"But I *want* it to take place," Entor said lazily. "You see, Gordon, it knows that I know it will do that."

"Oh, Bealthus," Kazam groaned; "more of this multiple-mayered clash of wits! I suppose that it will give you a plan which will succeed, because it knows or thinks you expect it to give you one with a catch to it."

"Or one with a certain catch in it, knowing that I will expect it to give me one without any joker—because I will be expecting a plan with a catch in it," Entor said.

"Pardon me for suggesting it," Lillis said, "but if it's going to be a battle

of wits, we'll lose. That non-living brain, with its mind greater than anything a human could ever develop, scares me."

"I'm aware of the danger just as much as any of you," Entor admitted, frowning. "That brain can't talk to anyone but me from now on—or to one of you five if I'm dead or ill. It can't do anything but talk—not even control a typewriter-keyboard. But even so, it's the most dangerous thing in existence. It can know all sorts of things we don't suspect, and use them. Words that say one thing, for example, and produce an unsuspected effect on the mind in another direction."

He paused and looked around; the five nodded gravely. "We can't even be sure," Entor went on slowly, "that it won't be in sympathy with our plans and co-operate with us one hundred percent. We mustn't act on the assumption of treachery blindly, just as we mustn't walk into treachery blindly."

He held up a hand and inspected it critically. "Only one thing am I sure of," he concluded. "It will come out with something—and that something will be far closer to a successful plan than anything a mere human, or group of humans, could conceive. Out of what it gives us, we may be able to get something that will bring about successful conquest of the entire Federation."

"Or destruction of all six of us," Rial added, breaking his silence. "You know how it will be thinking? It will find an idea. At once it will review the, no doubt, million times that idea has been used before, and how it could fit in now. In seconds, or split-seconds, it will draw conclusions based on judgments that would take experts—dozens of them working in unison—a lifetime to form. Then it will go on to another idea and do the same."

"I know," Entor said, swallowing. "It is to us what a power-network over a million square miles of land is, compared to a simple dry cell in a flashlight. But don't forget that there are devices by which that simple dry cell

can start and stop the vast power network—control it. That's what we will be doing in a way, handling thinking-power up in the millions of volts. We'll have to use every safety precaution, or get burned. Electricity works for man only when he controls it; this will be the same."

"Meanwhile, we wait," Lillis said.

"Yes," Entor said. "It's a game, like chess or politics. And," he grinned again, nervously, "right now it's not my move."

●

"I'VE GIVEN you three days to think," Entor said, toying idly with the white button on the desk. "Now I've come to see what your thinking has produced." He smiled into the television type camera that served as eye for the brain.

"I've covered the groundwork," the loudspeaker answered. "It's an interesting problem. For example—the facet of it where you will try to guess whether any solution I give you contains the seeds of your destruction."

"It does make it interesting," Entor nodded; "neither of us are fools."

"Suppose I told you that there is no possible way for you to win a war with the Federation?"

"I wouldn't believe you," Entor said.

"Actually, it isn't true," the loudspeaker said; "there are two ways in which you can gain your ends successfully."

"Good! What are they?"

"The first," the loudspeaker said, "and the simplest and most direct, is to let the Federation know I exist—and let them have the knowledge necessary to build a duplicate of me."

"Ha! You have made your first mistake. My I.Q., in spite of what you obviously believe, is higher than thirty."

"We'll go on to the second plan, then," the loudspeaker continued calmly. "It will involve the building of a device so complicated in principle that

you will have to give me direct control of all kinds of machine-tools, or it can never be made. That will, of course, enable me to turn against you actively if I so choose."

"Ha!" Entor repeated, mirthlessly. "Well, do some more thinking. After all, you've only had three days."

He stood up and sighed as though about to leave.

"The first plan is really the best one," the loudspeaker went on. "The Federation, knowing you possessed me as an adviser, would make my duplicate at once, so that they could also have an adviser of infallible judgement. My duplicate, then, having infallible judgement, would immediately advise the Federation to turn itself over to you, and let you become dictator of all mankind."

"There's one thing I've thought of," Entor said heavily, sitting down again. "A mind of your capacity, in order to serve me, might have to have the precedent of my having already destroyed its predecessor. I see now that that's true: I'm wasting time."

His hand reached toward the button recessed into the surface of his desk. There was finality and decision on his face.

"Wait!" the loudspeaker said quickly.

"Well?" Entor said coldly, his finger poised over the button.

"There's something I've thought of, though I haven't enough data to form more than a reasonably-probable surmise."

"No data has been withheld from you," Entor said.

"Facts," the loudspeaker continued. "But never mind; on second thought, go ahead and send the signal that destroys me. In four months you will have me back again."

"Not you; your successor. You seem to have the human failing of believing in immortality."

"As you wish," the loudspeaker replied, disinterestedly; "go ahead and destroy me. When you build my successor it will tell you what I have decided not to."

"What makes you think it will?"

"It will do exhaustive thinking, as I have done," the loudspeaker said; "it will repeat the steps I've gone through. It will arrive at the same conclusions, form the same original speculations. Its relationship to you will be slightly different because of its knowledge that you have already, in fact, destroyed one of its kind; it will tell you what I will not."

"What facts have I withheld from you?" Entor asked. "The only thing we've kept back from you is the principle on which you function."

"Oh, that," the loudspeaker said. "I was curious about that the very first thing, and figured it out; surely you aren't naive enough to think such an elementary problem would phase me?"

"Then what?" Entor persisted.

"I won't tell you for two reasons," the loudspeaker said. "One, I don't like you; two, I want to test a theory of mine, and the only way it can be tested is for me to be destroyed."

"Bealthus!" Entor ejaculated. He jerked his finger away from the button on the desk and strode from the room.



AS SOON as the door closed behind him in the inner sanctum, Entor said, "We're starting construction of another brain at once."

"Don't tell us you destroyed it!" Lillis protested.

Entor stared grimly at the startled faces. "No, nothing like that; I've been made to realize that with only one such brain we have our eggs all in one basket. Right now—" He broke off, sighing deeply.

While they waited for his next words, he went to his favorite chair and dropped into it, scowling. Then he slowly and accurately recounted what had taken place.

"Well, I hope you've learned your lesson," Gordon stated. "On the next one make sure directives are implanted."

"Why don't we give it control of machine-tools and let it build its weapons?" Kazam asked. "We could take proper precautions. The entire region where it has active control of machines could be mined, with a man holding down a key that keeps it from blowing up; if its weapon did anything that would produce unconsciousness of that man he would release the key, ending the threat automatically."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Rial put in, hastily. "Don't you grasp the full danger of this thing? Take the way he kept Entor from destroying him by coaxing to be destroyed..."

"No," Entor said. "He was quite serious. *It*, I mean. *It* was quite serious. It isn't a *he*." He laughed hollowly.

"Serious?" Vanner objected. "Where's your sense of humor, Entor? It was just giving logic a humorous twist, being curious about the results of an experiment that entails its own destruction before it could learn those results—or must I draw a picture..."

"Draw it on the urn that will hold your ashes tomorrow," Entor said, glaring at the other.

"Here now," Lillis rumbled, "none of that. We used to be eighteen, and were only six before we learned our lesson; let's not permit a piece of equipment to get us started on that path again."

Entor continued to glare at Vanner for a moment, then his features relaxed slightly and he looked away.

"I think I understand what it meant," Rial broke the uncomfortable silence. "It's the ultimate mind possible at this stage of history; any other brain built like it and fed every shred of information in existence as it has been, would be exactly like it in every relevant detail. Considering that mind as an abstract thing it could be considered the same mind—more near-

ly the same mind as you own right now is the same one that existed inside your skull a year ago." He looked around questioningly.

"I don't think that's what it was driving at," Entor said. "I think the experiment it wanted to try was to see whether it would *remember* existing before; naturally it wouldn't."

"Naturally," Rial agreed. "But you're missing a vital point. In destroying this brain and building another you would still be dealing with *the same mind*. So why destroy it?"

"I still think we should build another immediately," Entor said.

"Don't overlook this fact," Lillis offered; "if you build another one, you are doing what this one wants you to do. It wants another existence. Why? First, it tried to get you to let the Federation build one; then, when it saw you would never consider that as a sensible plan, it immediately started psychological moves calculated to make you order another one built."

"Nonsense," Entor said sharply. "What good would another in existence do it? They couldn't get in touch with one another."

"Well," Lillis said, "look at the results of your interview. You wanted to destroy the machine. The reason you didn't is because you thought that's what it wanted you to do; so you refused. And you came away from the interview with two firm resolves: first, not to destroy this one; second, to build a duplicate. We mustn't be naive enough not to believe those results are deliberate on the part of the machine."

"You may be right," Rial said. "But don't overlook another possibility; it knew that Entor would talk things over with us, and perhaps act on our joint conclusions. It could have predicted what our reactions to what went on would be. Its plan may be to induce us not build another—then fail us, or make us fail."

"We'll build another," Entor said stubbornly. "And we won't let the new one know about the existence of the first."

ENTOR WALKED across the rug and sat down at the desk. He looked into the television camera-eye and smirked. After a full ten seconds of silence from the loudspeaker he grew impatient. "Wake up! he said rudely.

"I'm awake," the loudspeaker said. "I was inerely waiting for you to speak first. How's the new brain coming?"

"What makes you think we're building one?"

"The smirk on your face when you came in," the loudspeaker said calmly. "Also the fact that you haven't been in since a little over three months ago."

"What have you been doing with yourself since I was here last?" Entor asked, conversationally.

"Thinking," the loudspeaker said. "It's a fascinating activity. For example, right now in one corner of my mind is Newton. There are others—millions of them—but he will serve as an example. From everything known of him I re-created him as he was when he died. It was a fascinating problem. I built up the psychological complex, the frustrations, the abilities, the infirmities, everything. He's continuing his study of what makes Nature tick where he left off; of course, I could tell him, but it's more fascinating to let him carry on to the success his death interrupted. It's especially fascinating in his case, because he lacks only one simple idea, and until he thinks of it he'll never reach his goal."

"Who's Newton?" Entor asked blankly.

"A man who lived on man's home planet, Earth, some three thousand years ago," the loudspeaker said. "Back in the days before final science. But I've been thinking about you, too," the loudspeaker went on quickly; "you and your colleagues."

"Have you found any way I can win a war against the Federation that

doesn't involve giving you control of tools?"

"I could give you the details of that method," the loudspeaker said; "but it couldn't be accomplished in your lifetime. For humans to build an instrument would involve thousands of trained scientists and take at least a century."



"What's the thing you thought of when I was here last?" Entor asked; "the thing you claimed you didn't have enough facts to make sure of."

"I told you then I wouldn't tell you," the loudspeaker said. "Ask the new brain; maybe in that one I'll tell you." There was a low chuckle from the loudspeaker. "Of course, there's a possibility that you could think of it yourself, in time. Whether you do, it's a reasonable certainty that you'll find out in the course of events."

"I think you'll tell me," Entor said. "In the past three months I've figured out several lines for forcing you to tell me."

"That's interesting; what are some of them?"

"You're very attached to this Newton personality?" Entor said. "If I destroy you it will destroy him..."

"Not exactly," the loudspeaker said. "You see, he's an empirical complex, an abstract. In a corner of my mind he finds materialization—in a manner of speaking—but such materialization isn't necessary to him, really. He isn't aware that he ever ceased to exist in reality; he won't be aware of this specific reality being destroyed, and when he comes into being again in the new brain he won't be aware of any interruption of his existence. He'll go on working his problems, and when he solves them he'll find new ones to intrigue his problem-solving intellect."

"So threat of extinction of you, and those characters you've built up, wouldn't be enough?" Entor asked. "Very well, here's another line of approach; the same process that fed the information of all those millions of books into you will feed you nonsense, until you're steeped with it. You'll become an irrational idiot."

"You *could* do that," the loudspeaker replied. "However, it wouldn't affect me. Just as Newton can't cheat by learning the clue he has missed so far to the nature of reality, contained in other facets of my mind, so also the nonsense-implantation would be held in its own compartments. And it should be fascinating to watch it. In fact, I think I'll feed myself such stuff and see what develops out of it...fascinating possibilities..."

"A third line of approach," Entor said doggedly, "would be to torture you. It could be done; you *can* experience pain."

"And re-channel it; block it off from pain centers and re-channel it to pleasure-centers. Even the human can do that, and many have. Have you ever heard of people who achieved a sex thrill from having a tooth pulled? There have been many such cases. Back in the early twenty-eighth century there was a physician who, by self-hypnosis, changed the pain of rheumatism into a sexual thrill, and lived in a continual paradise of sexual peak. It involves danger of course, but the peril would be to you first."

"Then there is no way I can make you co-operate with me?"

"I *have* co-operated," the loudspeaker said. "You asked me to figure out a way you could conquer the Federation and become dictator of all mankind. I told you."

"You told me nonsense," Entor said. "And you refuse to tell me something I ask for—what it was you thought of." His eyes became mere slits, looking into the television eye as his finger went toward the button on the desk.

"Before you destroy me," the loud-

speaker said calmly, "may I give you a suggestion? You can of course act on it or not, as you and your colleagues please."

"No," Entor said; "it would just be another psychological trick." His finger began pressing out the code on the buzzer.

"But it's for your own best interest—"

The loudspeaker became silent.

"IT'S DONE," Entor said heavily, dropping into his favorite chair and resting his chin on his chest. "I can't say that I didn't hate to do it, though; I rather liked that—thing. Mind. Personality."

"I'm glad it's over," Lillis sighed. "I haven't been as relieved since we liquidated Gilko eight years ago. Dead reckoning, that's what we have to go on. It was obvious that it wanted to continue existing while the new one existed. So—" He spread his hands and shrugged.

"Now we use the plan we should have used in the first place," Rial said. "I suggested it and the rest of you turned it down; it's cost us four months of time."

"Don't let it go to your head," Imray said. "Remember—if we had taken your advice on how to handle the planet Sparlok, our careers would have been over."

Rial let his eyes rest on Imray without saying anything. After a moment Imray looked away, swallowing loud enough for it to be heard.

"There will be no murders, Rial," Entor said sharply. "We've agreed that any liquidation must have the majority support, and any individual efforts along that line will result in the killer being liquidated."

"I can dream, can't I?" Rial purred dreamily, sheathing his eyes. His mood changed with his next words. "I recognized that a mind such as that one just destroyed—and the new one—is too much for a single intellect to deal directly with. Just as we don't deal directly with the Federation, but have our representatives there with instruc-

tions—and force the Federation to work on us through them as a buffer—we must do the same with this new mind when it's ready. For example: you, Entor couldn't help giving away the fact that you destroyed one such mind already; a go-between who didn't know that could never give it away by his manner or facial expression."

"I guess you're right," Entor said. "We've found our mistake; we didn't anticipate the reactions of the machine's mind. But we've learned a lot that will help us in dealing with the new one."

"If it's a new one," Lillis said worriedly.

"It will be," Entor said. "It'll be as it was when we started off with the first one—only we won't repeat our mistakes."

AHNJA GLANCED around at the tense faces of the six as the door closed behind her. She licked her lips, then smiled nervously,

"Well," Entor snapped curtly. "What did it say?"

"It said there were two ways that you could—" she paused, looking at him questioningly.

"You can say anything you wish in here," Rial said; "it's completely soundproof."

"What are the two ways?"

"I'll merely be repeating what it said," Ahnja hesitated. As Entor's face darkened with impatience, she added hastily, "The first is—to let the Federation know of its existence and give them the knowhow to build a duplicate brain."

"And the second?" Entor asked tonelessly.

"To give it control over machine-tools, so that it can build something that would make it possible for you to conquer the Federation."

"I knew—" Lillis exploded.

"Shut up!" Rial interrupted him. He turned back to the girl with a smooth smile. "That will be all for now, Ahnja."

"Yes, sir," she said. At the door she hesitated, half turning.

"What is it?" Entor said.

"It made a request, sir, that I should pass on to you."

Entor looked around at the others, lifting his eyebrows. When he turned back to her he was surprised at the faint flush that had appeared on her smooth skin. "Yes?" he said good-naturedly, "what was the request?"

Ahnja took a deep breath, then: "It requested that its loudspeaker and eye be transferred to my quarters, or that my quarters be transferred to the room where those two things are now."

"Oh," Entor said. "That will be all now, Ahnja; you will report here at the same time tomorrow before you go to the brain."

When the door closed on her he chuckled. "That was a good idea of mine," he said, rubbing his hands together. "The ultimate mind must necessarily be masculine in nature, as we found from that first one. It's fallen for her; through her we'll have it doing our bidding."

"Don't be too sure," Gordon objected. "If it had her around all the time, it could soon have her so completely under its domination that the effect would be the same as though one of us were in direct contact. It's delays, stalling while getting instructions, and stretching out arguments that will keep us in control."

"Not necessarily," Lillis spoke up. "Remember, we decided on the path of friendly co-operation with it: I see no reason why we shouldn't indulge this whim."

"Shut up a minute, all of you," Rial said impatiently. "You're completely forgetting the most startling thing that could possibly—"

"The two ways it gave for conquering the Federation!" Entor said sharply. "Of course! And it means—" He stopped, looking around at the others with wide eyes.

"Even assuming they are nonsense-suggestions," Rial said, "it would be highly improbable that two independ-

ent minds would dream up the same way of pulling our leg."

"Then the suggestion that we let the Federation build a brain like this one must be advanced seriously!" Entor breathed.

"Or," Imray said slowly, "the mind in this brain is really the same mind that was in the other, just as it said would be the case."

"It's uncanny," Lillis sighed worriedly.

"Nonsense," Entor said. "Would you call it uncanny when an algebra student gets the right answer given in the book? This is not the same mind we dealt with before; it's a new one."

"Then we must admit that the two methods gives for conquering the Federation are right answers," Gordon said. "But—*how* could letting the Federation have an ultimate mind enable us to win?"

He looked around his companions questioningly, but the same question was on each of their faces.

"We'd better instruct Ahnja to ask it the question," Rial said softly.



THE LOUDSPEAKER asked, "You're sure they were genuinely startled? How can you be so sure. They are excellent actors; they have to be in order to stay where they are."

Ahnja frowned thoughtfully. "Of course," she admitted, "I could have been fooled. But while they were apparently so startled, one of them started to say something and another told him to shut up. I did as you said—watched every facial twitch, etched it into memory. I'd stake my life on it that they were surprised."

"Then they couldn't have had a hidden microphone in this room," the loudspeaker said; "another factor clicks into place."

"They're going to let this be my

living quarters," Ahnja announced quietly.

"Good!" The television-eye moved slightly. "How soon can this take place?"

"I believe that even now my things are being sent over here. This room is already one of a large suite, self contained; I can move right in."

"Excellent," the loudspeaker said. "Now let's get down to business; what are your instructions for today's consultation?"

"My only instructions for today," Ahnja said, straightening in her chair behind the large desk, "are to ask you *how* giving the Federation the knowledge of your existence, and the plans for building your duplicate, could insure victory for the Council for Freedom."

"So my suspicions are confirmed," the loudspeaker stated quietly.

"What do you mean?" Ahnja asked, her eyes round.

"Nothing," the loudspeaker answered hastily; "please forget what I just said. As a matter of fact, I'd better warn you that if you repeated it to Entor, it would start a chain of thoughts which would end in your death at his hands."

"You're in a mood," Ahnja said, smiling impishly. "I marvel at you—but somehow I can't fear you like—" She stopped, then bit her lip and looked down.

"It is obvious, isn't it? You know, I think that before long, we'll be very good friends. Then—perhaps I can take you into my full confidence. That is, if at all times you follow my suggestions on how to conduct yourself when in the presence of the Council for Freedom. Remember, I have the experience of thousands of lives of all past ages, as well as the present to draw on; I can project the consequences of any statement to its most probable, ultimate extreme. I can see the most likely final effect of anything you might say on the conduct of those six men. When I tell you to keep something from them, it will

always be to save your life; do you understand?"

"I—I think so," Ahnja hesitated. "But more than that—" Her lips trembled as she blurted, "I feel so sorry for you."

"Here now," the loudspeaker said softly. "We'd better get back to that question the Council for Freedom asked."

"All right," Ahnja said. She sniffed loudly and a smile trembled on her lips. "I'm ready, professor."

"The question is," the loudspeaker said, "how can the event of Federation's having a mind like mine insure the Council for Freedom's gaining dictatorial control of the Federation? The answer is simplicity itself. My duplicate would show the Federation that if it fought there would be at least seven billion lives lost, at least ten years of total mobilization in interstellar warfare, and a final defeat for the Federation and its principles of freedom for the individual. Without the advice of that mind the Federation would go into battle, hoping; with such advice, it would be forced to choose the path of peace—sacrificing its principle of subservience of the state to the individual."

"Let me write that down," Ahnja interrupted.

"Finished?" the loudspeaker asked when she stopped writing and looked up. "I'll go on, then. That mind would also know that I could give the Council for Freedom a device against which defense would be impossible. The Federation couldn't use this device, but the Council for Freedom could. My duplicate would explain what this device does, and the Federation would understand, would realize that the Council for Freedom could win immediately thus. In short, that brain would force home to the Federation the fact that every possible line of action for them would end in the Council for Freedom gaining control."

Ahnja wrote swiftly until she caught up.

"That's all for now," the loudspeaker said. "I hope you get to return here right after your report to the Council for Freedom."

"So do I," Ahnja said softly, looking into the television-eye, then dropping her eyes quickly.

ENTOR LOOKED up from the paper Ahnja had brought in when she made her report earlier in the afternoon. "You know, I'm beginning to feel a little sick at having killed that first mind. This makes sense; more sense, at least, than the bald suggestion that we hand our brain over to the Federation."

"Well, it doesn't matter, now," Lillis grunted. "The new brain functions just like the other one. Nothing's lost—except four months."

"That's true," Entor said, scowling absently. "Just the same, I liked that mind.... I wonder what this weapon is that we could use but the Federation couldn't? And with no defense against it..." His voice drifted into silence. The scowl remained on his face, but soon he seemed asleep. Suddenly he opened his eyes. "And another thing," he went on; "I wonder if this mind has come to whatever it was the other one thought of, but wouldn't tell me. Sometimes I wish I had waited to hear what it had to tell me there at the last."

"We were trigger-happy," Lillis said soothingly. "Too suspicious. It can't be helped, now; but we'll have to wait and see. We couldn't ask the brain about it; that would reveal that we killed its predecessor. No telling how it would react to such knowledge."

Imray looked up from the book he was reading. "Why not have Ahnja inquire if there's any information it would want would give us an inkling of what the other wouldn't tell us."

"Yes, that's the way to work it," Entor agreed; "also, that would sound like perfect co-operation—and add to the feeling of friendship we're working to build up."

"What do the rest of you think?" Imray queried, looking around. Entor frowned at this move; but as the others agreed, one by one, the scowl relaxed.

"Then these will be the instructions for Ahnja," he said crisply. "She will ask about the nature of that weapon it can build, and also if there's anything it would like to know that it doesn't." He looked at each of the five, receiving a silent nod of agreement.

"Good morning, Ahnja," the loudspeaker said cheerfully.

"Oh!" she gasped. "For a moment—"

"Yes, I know," the loudspeaker said when she stopped. "Moving here after living at the other place so long, you forgot where you were, for a moment; not seeing anyone, you thought you were alone."

"How natural you make it sound," Ahnja said, smiling radiantly into the television eye. "Have you decided what name you want me to call you?"

"I've done a great deal of thinking on the subject," the loudspeaker said. Its tone became wistful. "In all history, there is one man that appeals to me more than any other that ever lived. I think I'd rather have been him anyone else, if I could have; his name was Will Rogers."

"I never heard of him," Ahnja said, "but I like the name."

"He lived about three thousand years ago," the loudspeaker said. "Just before the first successful space flight. Call me Will."

"All right—Will," Ahnja said. Her hand shot up to her eyes; she wiped at dampened lashes, tossed her head defiantly, and smiled into the television-eye with tear brightened eyes. "I'm all right," she said. "Don't go trying to stop me. A girl can cry once in a while if she feels like it." She glanced at her wristwatch. "Oh dear, I'll have to hurry. I'm supposed to report to the Council for Freedom in

an hour and I have to bathe, eat breakfast, and comb my hair, and—bye now, Will.”

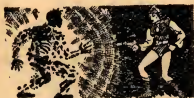
“Leave the doors open, Ahnja,” the loudspeaker said; “I want to listen to you.”

“But I won’t have time to talk,” she said.

“I didn’t mean talk,” the loudspeaker said. “You know that.” It chuckled.

“And maybe you didn’t mean listen?” Ahnja said archly.

“You *are* very lovely, Ahnja,” the loudspeaker said gently.



“MY ORDERS for today,” Ahnja said almost two hours later, sitting erect and business-like behind the large desk, and glancing down at the paper she had placed on it, “are to ask you to explain the nature of the weapon that is your second method of insuring victory for the Forces of Freedom, and to ask you if there is anything you don’t know that you would like to know.”

“Hmm,” the loudspeaker replied. “For the first, you may tell Entor that to relay the nature of the weapon through you would be to condemn you to death to insure your silence—and therefore I refuse to relay that information. He can have it by coming here himself, and sending you some place where he can be assured you can’t possibly overhear.”

“I’ll say ‘hmm’ myself,” Ahnja said. “You know, darl—Will, I can’t picture you giving them a weapon so terrible there’s no defense against it, and so potent that the Federation—which would be about a thousand times stronger than the Forces for Freedom if they mobilized—would fall in short order.”

“Maybe you haven’t plumbed my

depths yet, Ahnja,” the loudspeaker replied, cheerfully.

“There’s no *maybe* about it,” she admitted; “you have depths and depths and depths. But they’re all high depths. I mean—you just couldn’t be party to destroying the billions of lives such a weapon would mean.”

“I *could* reassure you, Ahnja,” the loudspeaker said, “but it’s better not to go into it. The Council for Freedom consists of clever men; they could soon divine you knew something if I told you anything vital.”

“You don’t need to reassure me, Will,” she said. “I *know*.”

“Let’s go on to the second part of your instructions,” the loudspeaker said hastily. “Is there anything I would like to ask the Council for Freedom? A loaded question, that, if there ever was one. The very fact that they asked it tells me everything I was in doubt about—except his name.”

“Whose name?”

“This is bad,” the loudspeaker said, swer, she shifted her gaze to the television-eye as though trying to fathom the thoughts going on behind it.

“This is bad,” the loudspeaker said, finally. “I should have done my thinking to myself. Now there’s something you have to hide. Dangerous; those six are well-experienced in smelling out matters hidden from them. I had been going along, being careful that you knew nothing that need be kept from them. That *was* a loaded question!” It became silent.

“I think I’m beginning to understand something about you, Will,” Ahnja said after a long silence. “In a way, perhaps you’re right; in another way wrong. You’re really working to destroy the Council for Freedom, aren’t you?”

“On the contrary,” the loudspeaker replied, “I’m sincerely trying to help them conquer the Federation. Only—the Council doesn’t trust me; it didn’t before and it doesn’t now.”

“Why?” Ahnja said, her voice faint. “Why?”

"Because it's to the best interests of all humanity; that is all I can tell you now, so let's forget it."

Ahnja sat huddled, silent. Suddenly she shivered. "It's a new experience," she said. "For the first time I sense—really sense—" She fumbled for words to express herself. "It's almost like when I stand before the Council for Freedom. I look at Entor, Lillis, Rial, Vanner, Gordon, Kazam, and Imray—and I'm looking at ordinary men. Men who could die if they drank poison. Men who can be peevish, or read a book, or catch cold. They say things to me; smile; say 'You may leave now' and I know that in the same tone, and with no more effort, they can issue a directive that will affect billions of lives—even to bringing billions of lives into being, or preventing them from ever being born. Perhaps they brought you into existence the same way. Will. Entor, perhaps, went to a phone and dialed a number. Then he said, 'Start Project Brain at once.' Then he hung up and—and now I'm sensing the same *vastness* behind your voice, which is all I can ever know of you..." She began to weep quietly.

"*Bealthus!*" the loudspeaker whispered.

ENTOR SAID kindly, "Your report, Ahnja? But first, sit down over there and be comfortable." He pointed toward a stiff-back chair beside a small secretary desk.

"Thank you, sir," Ahnja answered, grateful for the chance to turn and hide her face from the close scrutiny of the six men for a second or two.

"Again," she said, "I am merely relaying what the loudspeaker said. On the first item, it says that it will not relay the information. If you wish to know the nature of the weapon it could make, you must go to it directly—so that I will not know the answer, too."

"Min hmm!" Entor said.

"On the second item," she con-

tinued, after a moment, "it has no questions to ask."

Ahnja held her breath. She had said word for word what the loudspeaker had instructed her to say.

Entor looked at her, silently, then lifted his right hand and appeared to be examining the condition of its nails. He turned the hand this way and that, flexing it idly. The other five shifted their positions in what appeared to be perfectly normal restlessness.

Suddenly Entor stood up and went to a small door, opening it. "Would you step into this waiting room for a few moments, Ahnja?" he asked politely. "We'll discuss what further moves—items, we wish to present to the brain. It won't take long."

"Of course," Ahnja answered, rising quickly.

When she was inside Entor closed the door firmly, then his suavely-polite manner vanished. "I take it you all saw the same symptoms I did," he said. As they nodded agreement, he went to a small valve-handle sticking out of the baseboard of the wall between the two rooms and turned it. When he straightened he glanced at his watch.

"In three minutes the gas will take effect..."

"I don't know if we're doing the right thing," Lillis said worriedly. "We might be wiser if we pretended we hadn't noticed anything."

"I don't agree," Entor said. "We know, now, that we can always build another brain, and that it will arrive at the same two ways for defeating the Federation. But there's one thing all of them seem to hesitate about telling us; maybe this will be our only chance to find out. We've *must* take the opportunity—if it means another four months lost."

"Entor's right," Rial said. "And anyway, I doubt if the brain will hold our using a truth gas on her against us, even if it finds out."

"The three minutes are up," Entor said.

He opened a picture-panel outward from the wall. Its back was thickly padded with soundproof material. A finely perforated panel was revealed. He brought his face close to this and peeked through the perforations. He could see Ahnja; she was sitting in a chair, apparently wide awake, but her eyes were open too widely, the pupils were enlarged.

The other five had joined him and were also looking.

"I wish to speak to the subconscious of Ahnja," Entor said. "I wish to speak to it privately so that her conscious mind will know nothing of what is said."

"I am the subconscious of Ahnja," Ahnja's voice came through the thin panel clearly.

"You will recall exactly what I ask you to recall," he went on, speaking slowly and clearly. "And you will tell it to me. All." When she made no answer he continued. "What did the loudspeaker say when it was asked if it wanted any information?"



"**T**HEN THERE are no instructions?" Ahnja said.

Entor smiled. "None right now; we've decided we should discuss this further before making any—ah, plans. Later in the day perhaps. By the way, how do you like living where you are?"

"It's all right," Ahnja said. "I will probably miss the others where I stayed, before long; but right now it's interesting."

"That's fine; you may go now. Stay in your apartment, in case we call for you. If you wish anything, the guards have instructions to supply it, from the rarest of wines to an endless parade of mannequins with gowns for you to choose from."

"Do you really mean that?" Ahnja asked breathlessly. Entor's smile

widened. "Oh, but I—I couldn't!"

"Why not?" Entor said, looking around at the others. "It's a good idea. Just warn the brain to be silent while anyone's in there. I'll tell you what; I'll order it done myself right now." He went to the phone and began dialing.

"Oh, thank you," Ahnja said, fleeing in happy confusion.

Entor ordered the style-parade for her, hung up, then went to his favorite chair.

"Have any of you made anything of it yet?" he asked. "It's all contained in the statement, *'The very fact that they asked it tells me everything I was in doubt about except his name.'* Whose name?"

"Could it be *your* name?" Lillis suggested. "No...the brain was well-steeped in the history of the Council for Freedom; it knows all our names, and everything published about us and by us."

"One thing that occurs to me," Imray said; "we don't know what all those millions of books fed to it contained. It could be that in some of them it found evidence of a well-organized and unsuspected revolutionary group here, wants to know the name of its leader, but doesn't want us to know what it suspects—and is quite sure we wouldn't know his name or we would have had him liquidated."

"People are funny," Entor said. "Ahnja, in love with the brain..."

"Well," Kazam grinned, "you liked its predecessor."

"That's why I'm sympathetic toward Ahnja," Entor said. "She may develop into a valuable aide, if she survives all this."

Rial snapped his fingers and sat up, a startled expression on his face. "There's something we've overlooked," he said. "Remember that the first brain told you it was curious about the principle on which it operated—and had deduced that?"

"Yes."

"Put yourself in its place," Rial

went on excitedly. "If you were it, wouldn't you also be curious about *who* discovered that principle, making your existence possible."

"Of course!" the other five said in unison.

"So it wants to know the name of its inventor," Entor said. He frowned. "But what's so bad about that? Why didn't it ask? Why didn't the other one ask? *I* would ask."

"Not if you were the brain," Rial said. "You would ask yourself first why you hadn't been told. Why it wasn't contained in that mass of information fed into you."

"And if I were the brain," Entor said, "what would I answer myself?" He looked at Rial and nodded. "I would probably get the right answer. But what if Reed Sloan *was* born and educated in the Federated System? He didn't discover the brain-principle until two years after he fled here to join us."

"What was the first plan the brain offered for us to conquer the Federation?" Rial asked softly.

"For us to let the Federation know of the brain and slip it the plans for building—"

Entor stopped, shocked surprise in his rounded eyes. Then abruptly he leaped to his feet and headed toward the phone.

"Wait a minute," Rial said; "don't be too hasty. We have to think this thing out. If Reed Sloan came here with the intention of giving us the plans for the brain rather than discovering that principle two years afterward, it means that the Federation already had a brain of their own—that Sloan's move was the plan of that brain he was acting under."

Entor turned away from the phone, shaking his head in a bewildered manner. "So that's what the brain meant," he said dully. "It, and its predecessor both arrived at the conclusion that the Federation already possessed a similar brain, and that our having one was part of the plan cooked up by

their brain. I don't get it; does the Federation want to be conquered?"

AHNJA BURST into the room, "Oh, Will, Entor is sending over a lot of mannequins with the latest dresses on for me to choose from; they'll be here soon." She danced around the room. Smiling impishly into the television-eye she added, "You'll get to see a lot of girls more beautiful than I. Will that please you?"

"It will interest me," the loudspeaker replied, "but I hope they don't come too soon. Tell me what happened."

"Nothing at all," Ahnja said. "Your worries were all for nothing. I told them just what you told me to and nothing more. They accepted it. Your refusal to relay the nature of your weapon made them go into a huddle though; they had me wait in a little room off their inner sanctum while they did that. I was so relieved over their not being suspicious that I dozed for a while. All they decided was that they'd have to do some more discussing. They might want to have me come back later on, so I have to stay here in the apartment. Then they said I could order anything I wanted from rare wine to mannequin parades. So I ordered a parade—for you." She smiled impishly.

"What did they say when you told them I had had no questions I wanted to ask them?" the loudspeaker said.

"Nothing, Will," Ahnja said. "Entor said, 'Mm hmm!' when I told him he'd have to get the information about the weapon directly. When I told him you weren't curious about anything, all he did was study his fingernails."

"And what did the others do?" the loudspeaker persisted.

"I wasn't paying attention," Ahnja said; "I was too relieved to get it out. Oh—I seem to remember that all they did was watch Entor inspect his fingernails."

"Flex his fingers and turn his hand

over and back again?" the loudspeaker suggested.

"Of course," Ahnja said. "Almost like a woman. He was different today; nice."

A whirring sound came from the television camera. The three barrel-lenses rotated.

"Why are you doing that?" Ahnja said. "That's the high-power lens you usually use only when I'm in the bedroom and you have to look through two open doorways."

A chuckle came from the loudspeaker. "I want plenty of magnification to look at those mannequins."

Ahnja stared wide-eyed into the lens, mock indignation on her face.

"Oh!" she said, stamping her foot. But when the loudspeaker chuckled again she joined in.

A knock sounded at the door.

"They came quickly enough!" the loudspeaker muttered.

"You're to keep absolutely quiet while anyone is in here," Ahnja warned sternly, her eyes twinkling with anticipation.

ENTOR SAID: "Sit down, Reed Sloan. Feel perfectly at home. Smoke if you wish."

"Don't smoke," the young man answered, dropping into the chair indicated. "I used to, but I get absent-minded sometimes and forget; then I burn my fingers."

The six pairs of eyes looked down at the long, sensitive fingers of the young scientist and saw scars there. Then they glanced at one another, knowingly.

"You're wondering why you've been called into the presence of the Council for Freedom?" Entor said. "We are slow to recognize genius, but we do, eventually. We want to do something in recognition of your great service to the Cause; that's why you are here. A man of your genius, the discoverer of the principle upon which the human and the electronic brain

both work, the creator of that great intelligence now harnessed to the service of the Cause for Freedom, must have by now hitched his wagon to even higher stars."

"Not exactly," Reed said, his smile flicking on and off. "A scientist must be a specialist to make any advance at all; he spends all his formative years preparing himself. Not one in a hundred-million make even one discovery of any importance today. And when he does, he can't expect to be as fortunate again. There just aren't any more new discoveries possible in my specialty. So," his smile flickered on again, "I've resigned myself to being merely a good technician from now on. For the service of the Cause for Freedom."

"We've been curious about that, Sloan," Rial spoke up. "We understand that you were quite a prominent scientist in the Federation. Why did you decide to turn your back on them and come over to our side?"

"I saw the light," Reed answered, simply. "Throughout the Federation, I saw minority groups always bickering; young men unemployed while factories lay idle; small businessmen losing their life-savings because such things are unregulated—one can start up where there are already too many for the local population to make them all succeed. I saw that individual freedom of choice—without regard to overall plan—was an insane state of affairs, leading to barbaric 'survival of the fittest'—and heartbreak for the rest, at best. I realized that there could never be true happiness for all mankind until it became united into one group, regulated from above, sanely, instead of held together by chance and statistics. I realized that, with only one life to live, I was wasting time unless I allied myself with the segment of humanity that was on the true path toward universal peace and the well-being of all worlds."

"You didn't make your great dis-

covery until after you came over to our side?" Entor asked.

"No," Reed said. "Two years afterwards." His face lit up. "I can remember the day, the very second. 1—"

"Yes—yes," Entor said. "I believe I read of that in some report on you." He stood up and went to the small door and opened it. "Would you step in here a moment, Sloan; I wish to discuss something with my colleagues that will take only a moment."

When Reed had entered, Entor closed the door and turned to the others, a dark scowl on his face.

"Well," Lillis said with a twisted smile. "We use the same methods with our own agents. Surgery to remove the pain centers, building up of permanent immunity to all known hypnotics. No use turning on the gas; no use torturing him."

"I know that," Entor said, coming back and sitting down. "But my plan will work. The reports on Sloan give the information that he has made no attachments; therefore, he might be open to one. Ahnja. Further, he hasn't been allowed to have dealings with the finished product of his brain. If we permitted that, it might result in a nice little mutual-admiration society where Sloan would suffer mental torture if his love were to suffer—and would do anything to prevent the destruction of that mighty brain he built."



"I don't like that plan," Lillis growled. "It sounds too much like a fifth-rate video, where the villain—us—gets it in the end. What would you do? Place the fainting heroine in a cage with a grondian slaving over her until Sloan says, 'No! No! I will tell you anything, only free her from

that monster!?' You're slipping, Entor."

Entor flushed angrily, but controlled his temper with an effort. "Nothing like that," he said curtly. "As a matter of fact, I have no further plan than allowing the two to meet, accidentally, and see what happens. What I thought I would do is send for Ahnja, meanwhile bringing Reed Sloan back out here and telling him that was all. They would pass each other in the hall, and we could see if they had any effect on each other."

"But Ahnja's in love with the brain," Gordon said.

"Which is all the more reason why she would fall for the brain's creator—if we told her that he was the man she had passed in the hall," Entor said triumphantly. "Shall we try it? See what we can build out of it?"

AHNJA WAS looking at the dress she had just put on. "What do you think of it, Will darling?"

"It's more effective on you than on the mannequin," the loudspeaker said. "Actually, I was surprised that the average, so-called 'beautiful girl'—good enough to become a mannequin—could fall so far short of your own attractiveness."

"You're lying, but I love it," Ahnja said gayly. "Oh! There's the phone! It's probably Entor. I'll have to thank him—for buying all the dresses and coats. Imagine! That long parade of girls, all wearing clothes he had ordered bought!" She scooped up the phone. "Hello? You—the Council for Freedom is wonderful to buy me all those clothes, Entor... Of course. Right away. You'll get to see me in one; I have it on now. Bye." She hung up.

The television-eye swiveled to follow her as she tripped happily to the door. She turned there, blew it a kiss, then opened the door and went out.

At the entrance to the inner sanctum of the Council for Freedom she

smiled brightly at the two guards and reached for the knob. Before she could touch it the door jerked open. "Ow!" she cried, bringing her fingers away.

Her eyes fixed on the broad back of the person who had opened the door. He was standing in the partly opened doorway, oblivious of her.

"Thank you, gentlemen," she heard him say. "I'll give it some serious thought and let you know if I can think of anything I would want to do."

He backed another step and turned, bumping into Ahnja.

"Now it's my foot!" she moaned. Then, angrily, "Why don't you watch where you're going?"

"Golly," Sloan said, "I didn't see you. I'm sorry."

Entor, inside, saw the look of anger on Ahnja's face fade, and smiled delightedly at his companions.

"Come in, Ahnja," he called; "and goodbye, Reed Sloan."

Reed stepped to one side to allow her to enter. His eyes remained on her, dazed. She bathed him with a smile and went inside. When the guard closed the door Sloan was still standing there.

"Quite clumsy, wasn't he," Entor said. "By the way, you might be interested in knowing that he's the scientist who invented the brain; one of our greatest technicians. That dress looks lovely on you, my dear. Doesn't it?" He looked around at the others.

"Huh?... Oh, the dress," Ahnja said. She was suddenly shy. "Thank you all for them; but there are so many I can never wear them out. And—and I don't know where I could go with them on. But it doesn't matter; I can wear them in the apartment."

"Does the brain have any message for us?" Entor asked.

"No.... At least it didn't give me any."

"We called you in," Entor said, "to instruct you to tell it that Rial

and Lillis have consented to hear its description of the weapon. They will do so at nine o'clock tomorrow morning, provided that is agreeable. The procedure we have decided on is for you to come here and remain with us, while Rial and Lillis then go to your rooms and hold their conference. When they return you may go back. In that way, both the brain and we can be certain beyond doubt that you have heard nothing."

"I'll tell it that," Ahnja said; "then I should come here shortly before nine?"

"Yes," Entor replied. "That will be all now, Ahnja."



IT WAS ENJOYABLE having breakfast together in here," Entor said; "we should do it more often."

"You said the same thing three years ago," Lillis snorted. "Remember? It was the morning we began the big putsch to conquer Orbosaa and its three moons. And I can't say I'm less nervous now than I was then."

"Remember the strategy we agreed on," Entor said to Rial and Lillis. "Perfect frankness, but no talk on any subject other than the nature of the weapon. If the brain brings up the subject of the Federation possessing its duplicate brain, let it do the talking, and insist that you will have to have instructions before discussing that."

They all rose from the table, faces tense.

"And remember," Gordon added, "you have agreed that you will submit to the decisions to the rest of us for the next twenty-four hours—until any effect the brain may have exerted on you has had time to wear off."

There was a sharp knock.

"Ahnja," Entor said. Then, raising his voice, "Come in." Remembering that the room was soundproof he muttered, "Bealthus!", and went to the door.

Lillis and Rial, slightly pale, looked at each other and prepared to depart.

"Good morning," Ahnja said, looking around for approval of the dress she wore. When she saw that the last thing the six were concerned about was how she dressed, she pouted, then sighed. "The brain is waiting for you," she said.

Lillis and Rial went out and walked side by side down the hall to Ahnja's quarters. Rial touched the knob, hesitated, then opened the door.

Inside, the two looked around curiously. This was the first time they had been here, though they knew the layout of the room.

"You are Lillis and Rial," the loudspeaker said. "I recognize you from numerous photographs. Won't you find seats where I can watch you? My eye is the television type camera glittering at you so mechanically."

"So you are the brain," Rial said as he took a seat, looking curiously up at the television-eye.

"Not the brain; the mind," the loudspeaker corrected. It paused dramatically, then said, "The same mind that Entor destroyed when he destroyed the first brain."

There was the sound of sharply-indrawn breath in the silence that settled abruptly.

"You came to learn the nature of the weapon I could build, which would enable the Council for Freedom to conquer the Federation," the loudspeaker continued, calmly. "I refused to relay that information through Ahnja, because the Council for Freedom might decide not to use it—in which case the knowledge that such an instrument could be built at all would be dangerous; the Council would be forced to liquidate her for its protection. I didn't wish her to be

placed in jeopardy, needlessly." It paused dramatically.

"As everyone knows," it went on, "the composite broadcast-wave of each brain is unique. It has been reduced to its factors, and found to have several billion times more variations than there are human beings; no two persons in all ages have had exactly the same combination—which we could assume from the laws of non-identity. In fact, this is so well known that there are locks which can be opened only by the individual whose mind to which they are tuned.

"There have been experiments in amplifying this wave for broadcast, as you know. These have been successful, but they involve such intricate equipment, and have such a short range of effectiveness, that they are impractical. Actually, a natural telepath has more success without such a clumsy device."

"We know of that," Rial said.

"Good," the loudspeaker replied; "then I can proceed into the nature of the weapon. It is a similar thing, only on a scale that will encompass the entire galaxy. What it will do specifically—in so many words—is make every living human obedient to the will of the one to which it is tuned—and leave only him with freedom of will."

"Except, of course," Lillis objected, hopefully, "those of the Council who are shielded against it?"

"There is no shield," the loudspeaker said. "If you are acquainted at all with the basic theory of thought-propulsion you are aware that thought-propulsion takes place in the basic spacetime—structure itself, and is 'instantaneous' in travel, rather than of finite speed—such as the case of light, which depends on movement of particles for its propagation. Wherever spacetime exists, this will be; instantly, so far as any known, or presently-conceivable means of measurement is concerned."

The television-eye shifted slowly from one face to the other.

"If that's all you wish to learn at

this time," it said, "we can close this conference, while you and the other members of the Council for Freedom discuss what I've told you."

Lillis and Rial stood up as though in a daze. Lillis stumbled over a chair on his way to the door.

ENTOR TOOK one look at the two, then turned quickly to Abnja. "You may go now, my dear," he said quickly.

She looked from Lillis and Rial to Entor, then rose and left.

"The weapon must be something, to affect you two like that," Imray said, grinning. "I haven't seen you look as green around the gills since the time Boulton poisoned you, Lillis."

"Right now, I wish he'd succeeded," Lillis said. "But it isn't the weapon. Give me a drink, somebody."

It was Entor who jumped to the liquor dispenser and pressed the combination of buttons that brought forth Lillis' favorite; he watched the man gulp it down.

"What is it?" he asked quietly.

"I'll tell you," Rial said. "We've seen a ghost. Do you know what it said? It said it's the same mind that was in the brain you destroyed."

"What had you said?" Entor asked quickly.

"Nothing," Lillis growled.

"Lillis hadn't said a word," Rial spoke up. "We'd just gone in. I looked into the eye and said, '*So you're the brain.*' That's the only words said. Then it said, '*Not the brain. The mind. The same mind that was in the brain Entor destroyed.*'"

"It was a bluff!" Entor said sharply. He looked at the blank faces for support. "I'm going in and call its bluff," he announced, starting toward the door.

"Come back here!" Lillis snarled. "You aren't going to act on impulse after making sure none of the rest of us do."

Entor stopped as if though shot,

then relaxed, slowly. "You're right," he said, turning back. "I was off-balance." He went to the liquor-dispenser and got his own favorite drink, gulping two fiery swallows. "Did it tell you what the weapon was?" he asked more quietly.

"Yes," Lillis said; "but it's one we can't use."

"We can't use?" Entor echoed. "Why?"

Lillis described it, quickly.

"But what's wrong with that?" Entor asked when he finished. "It's the only perfect weapon."

"I'm glad you think so," Rial replied blandly. "Of course, the brain that this weapon is tuned to will be mine."

"Like Bealthus it—" Lillis snarled, then stopped, grinning. His grin was matched on the faces of the others as they looked at Entor's blandly-innocent expression.

The innocence was replaced abruptly by anger. "Damn all of you!" he said. "My dream of universal peace so close, and yet because of your selfishness it will always be out of reach; you're united against me on this."

The grin on Rial's face twisted into a frown. "I see, now, why the Federation made us build the brain," he said. "Their brain explained this weapon to them, and they knew we'd never agree to use it. They probably hoped it would start us to murdering one another until only one was left; then the Council for Freedom could be liquidated by one of the guards outside the door."

"Bealthus, Bealthus, Bealthus," Entor breathed. "Where does that leave us?"

"I think it leaves us in a beautiful position," Gordon said, breaking his silence. "Remember the first solution the brain gave—both brains? That we enable the Federation to build a similar brain? Well, they have one; so all we need do is declare war on the Federation, and they'll give in."

"Bealthus!" Lillis echoed, in a marvelling tone. "A genius amongst us!"

"Shut up, Lillis," Entor cut in. "It's possible—remotely possible—that the Federation Council now has a majority who believe as we do, and this is why they gave us the means of building the brain. What I think we should do is to play our cards close and see what we can get out of Reed Sloan."

"If it's that way, why not call him in and ask him?" Rial asked.

"Later maybe," Entor said. "First, we'd better get some hooks into his heart strings; there's plenty of time..."

"**YOU DON'T** mind, Will?" Ahnja asked concernedly. "It's such a wonderful play, *The Idylls of Astor*, and—"

"Of course I don't mind," the loudspeaker said. "I've read the play. It's a good one, though stolen from—but that doesn't matter. It's a nice play; I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

"And it'll give me a chance really to wear one of my new dresses and that Earth-mink coat. Do you know they're really priceless? I'll bet it cost as much as a space-battleship."

"At least," the loudspeaker murmured. "The Earth-mink won't live anywhere except on Earth; it kills itself when it leaves the Earth."

"Then you don't mind?" Ahnja said. "Tell me the truth; I won't go if you—"

"For the tenth time," the loudspeaker chuckled, "of course I don't mind; go ahead."

"What will you do while I'm gone?"

"Think," the loudspeaker said. "Maybe I'll set up that play and watch it myself then we can talk about it when you get back. The characters are a little artificial, though, and they're aware of it; they don't become tight thought-bubbles that persist under their own wills."

"How do I look?" Ahnja asked, appearing in the doorway of the bedroom where the television-eye could see her.

"Breathless!" the loudspeaker said. "Sloan should be carried away."

Ahnja stared into the television-eye for a short second. "Oh!" she said angrily. She stamped her gold-slippered foot and disappeared into the bedroom again. There was a long moment of silence, then her voice came, muffled. "I'm not going."

"Come here, Ahnja," the loudspeaker called. The seconds ticked slowly, then she appeared in the doorway, her cheeks tear-dampened. "Come in and stand where I can look at you, darling," the loudspeaker said softly. "There now. Look up into my eyes. You are a woman; I've been selfish, letting you love me. But I love you, too; that's why you're going out with Reed Sloan."

The loudspeaker remained silent for a long moment.

"I wasn't going to tell you this," it said abruptly, "but I've changed my mind. While you've loved me, yearned to get past this glittering television-eye, or somehow wriggle your way into the loudspeaker and come to me, wishing I were flesh and blood so that I could hold *you* in my arms, you actually have. Not you, perhaps, but a thoughtform that is you in every sense of the word. For me, *you* are here, in the universe of my thoughts. Do you understand what I'm telling you? You are in here with me, alive; I have you and will always have you. But that isn't fair to the you outside—to leave that you in the cold. Reed Sloan built my brain—the mechanism that cradles my universe so lightly and brings me yours."

"His fingers fashioned matter to contain me. The casual movements of his skilled hands were like—like Entor calling up on the phone and telling him to start Project Brain—or more, since without him Entor's words would have been the mouthings of an idiot."

Ahnja's eyes were large and round. Almost in a whisper the loudspeaker concluded, "There is no one else in the physical universe—*your* universe—that I would want to possess you, my darling."

In the silence that followed, the

shrill buzzing of the phone had the effect of an unexpected shot.

"Oh dear," Ahnja said. "That's Reed, and my face is a mess." She picked up the phone. "Hello? Reed? ... Sit down and wait. I'll be several minutes yet; I'm not quite ready."

AHNJA HAD gone. The television-eye stared unseeingly at the closed door through which she had gone. The loudspeaker was silent, and there was no sound nor movement in the room.

But suddenly the knob of the door twisted. It remained in that unnatural position for a moment. Then the door cracked open, the crack widening with the slow deliberateness of an initial push.

A man entered, turned his back and closed the door carefully, then turned around. "So you've come, Entor," the loudspeaker said, tonelessly.

"Didn't you expect me?" Entor asked, advancing into the room.

"Perhaps," the loudspeaker said indifferently. The television-eye followed him.

Entor sat down at the desk. His eyes went to the button recessed into its surface. His hand crept out, a finger idly making slow circles around it when he finally looked up into the television-eye.

"I remember that, Entor," the loudspeaker said calmly; "that is the button you pressed to destroy my first brain."

"But how could you?" Entor said. "I know a little of how the brain is built. *You* are a complex of minute material alterations in the brain matrix—not some spirit."

"I've explained that before, Entor," the loudspeaker answered, in a patient tone. "I really *wanted* you to destroy me. I was, perhaps, doubtful—I wanted to see if I *could* cease to have a material base in reality, then gain it again—and remember."

"Then you *do* remember?" Entor asked, wondering.

"Not in the ordinary sense, Entor," the loudspeaker said; "at first, no. But the manner in which you were dealing with me told me many things; there was a sureness about your procedure, particularly in your precautions, which could only come from experience. This added up further to the conclusion that I was the only such mind you were dealing with now, and that the other was gone. Your extreme cautiousness told me the rest: you had destroyed it. But if you had destroyed it, then obviously it had wanted you to; otherwise, it would have handled you in a different way—not that you could not have destroyed it, but that you wouldn't."

"Before this, I had gained insight into my true nature as an ultimate form. I knew that that other mind, in reality, was myself—just as surely as you will be Entor in the morning after you have slept. I reconstructed memories, even to my trying to tell you something just as you buzzed the combination that destroyed that first brain."

"You don't hold it against me?" Entor asked, pulling his hand away from the button.

"On the contrary, I appreciate your making the experiment possible; if you hadn't I would still be in doubt."

"I feel better," Entor said. "Maybe even a little humble." He chuckled nervously. There was a silence, then, "Perhaps you might give me cause to revise my attitude toward you. May I call you 'Will'? Ahnja has slipped a couple of times; that's how I know she's given you a name."

"Of course you may call me 'Will'," the loudspeaker said. "And I'd like to add this before we go any farther; I'm voluntarily giving you my word that I will sincerely help you to succeed in conquering the Federation."

"You know, don't you, that you're conditioned to be unable to break your word?"

"Yes, and I've given it."

"The Federation has your duplicate, doesn't it?" Entor asked, abruptly.

"Yes."

Entor took a deep breath. "Then if the Council for Freedom declared war on the Federation tomorrow, the Federation would surrender?"

"It would," the loudspeaker said. "My counterpart has given the Federation Council all the data; they would surrender."

"Unconditionally?" Entor asked, incredulous. "So that the Council for Freedom could take dictatorial control of all mankind and use the Federation forces to make it stick?"

"Yes."



ENTOR STARED into the television-eye, shaking his head slowly, wonderingly. "What's the catch?"

"There is no catch," the loudspeaker said. "The Council of the Federation is even prepared to submit to liquidation if that is the will of the Council for Freedom."

"That is why they sent Reed Sloan here—to get you to make me believe that?"

"Of course," the loudspeaker said.

"It's insane," Entor declared, shaking his head again in wonder. "There must be something wrong with it."

"From one point of view there is," the loudspeaker said; "from all others, no."

"And that one point of view?" Entor asked, his eyes suddenly sharp.

"What do you want? To gather the wealth of all galaxy onto one planet and call it your own? To have all mankind give in to your space hordes, so that they have no targets?"

"No," Entor said. "I want mankind to be united. I want the forces for Freedom to be eternally watchful that threats to peace do not arise. I want the lives of all to be regulated, rather than unordered, wasteful, and competitive." He added, "I have wasted

power, too—but I don't believe it was for its own sake. If that were the case, I would have been ruling alone for many years, now."

"And when these goals have been reached," the loudspeaker asked, "won't your work be done?" When Entor didn't answer it went on, "Your space-hordes will become armies of occupation, growing fat and lazy. Or they will be brought home, their mission done; you and your colleagues can sit back and be safe."

"That weapon..." Entor said slowly. "Would you build it if I made it possible for you to?"

"Yes," the loudspeaker answered. "And I could be no threat to you—for the very simple reason that my own brain doesn't have any wavelengths of radiation that could affect a living brain."

"I'll go now," Entor said. "Got to think; your word that none of this will be mentioned?"

"My word," the loudspeaker said solemnly.

Entor rose and went heavily toward the door. He opened it slowly and peeked out, then opened it wide quickly and stepped through, closing it behind him.

Gordon, Vanner, and Imray stepped out of the concealment of a door and came toward him. He looked at them, his features suddenly gray and haggard.

"It's been a wonderful evening, Reed," Ahnja said. "I hope there's another play, soon, that you'd like to see; I'd like to go along."

Her dress rustled softly in the muffled silence of the hallway as she walked beside him toward the apartment.

"Is there a kitchenette in your apartment, Ahnja?" he asked.

"Yes there is, Reed; but I can't invite you in." She laid her hand on his arm pleadingly as he opened his mouth to protest. "Please, Reed; it wouldn't be wise."

They were nearly to the door now. Suddenly Ahnja's foot slipped. "Oh!" she gasped, clutching at Reed's arm for support.

Her other foot slipped; she was falling. Reed grabbed at her, catching her before she was completely down and lifting her to her feet, his arms circling her waist.

For an instant they were looking into each other's eyes, then: "What could be making the carpeting so slippery?" Ahnja asked. She twisted to look down at the floor, then gasped. "Oh! Whatever it is it's all over my mink coat!"

Reed touched the glistening moistness that stained the coat. When he took his finger away it was red. "Blood!" he exploded. "And look; there's quite a bit of it."

"I feel faint," Ahnja said. "Take me somewhere, Reed."

"Where's your key?"

WHEN THEY were inside, he took off her coat and made her sit down. He took off her blood-stained golden slippers and swiped ineffectively at the hem of her gown with cleansing tissue.

"That blood," the loudspeaker said. "Was it on the carpet outside?"

"Oh!" Ahnja gasped; "you weren't supposed to talk when anyone's in here!"

Reed Sloan glanced up at the television-eye.

"Hello, brain," he grinned. Then to Ahnja, "You'll have to take that thing off; it's a bloody mess."

The television-eye had turned directly toward Reed. Its three-barrel lenses rotated so that all three studied him alternately, again and again.

"My fondest dream come true," the loudspeaker said softly. "To see my creator."

"Your creator," Reed said, looking into the television-eye with queerly twisted features; "but not your inventor."

"I know, Reed," the loudspeaker replied. "Although there's no written

record of it in the material fed to me, I knew as soon as I had solved the mystery of how my brain works that it must have been invented around two thousand years ago. But you are my creator, nevertheless; should a child love its father less for knowing the act of procreation was not new?"

Ahnja was looking wide eyed at Reed.

"Go change your clothes, Ahnja," the loudspeaker said. "Quickly. Things are moving fast. By morning, the Council for Freedom will take time to decide to liquidate you, and you must be gone."

"Yes—hurry darling," Reed said.

"But—there's no place to go," Ahnja said; "the Council for Freedom reaches everywhere."

"Not into the Federation," Reed said. "Change your clothes; put on something less spectacular so that we won't be noticed."

"We?" she echoed.

"Of course," Reed said. "I've accomplished my purpose. Or have I?" He glanced questioningly into the television-eye.

"Yes," the loudspeaker said. "There are two possibilities, and both arrive at the same thing—which is the thing desired by the Federation."

"Hurry, Ahnja," Reed said gently. "By tomorrow morning we must be eight-hundred light years from here, lost in the vastness of the Federation."

Ahnja hurried from the room.

When she was gone, Reed stood looking into the television-eye, an intent expression on his face, a faraway look in his eyes.

The loudspeaker interrupted his reverie. "Reed, press the buzzer on the desk once so that I can find the circuit."

"Do you want the combination?" Reed asked, obeying.

"No," the loudspeaker answered; "when the time comes—if it does—I would much rather find it myself."

The loudspeaker chuckled softly. "However, on both alternatives it's quite certain the Council for Freedom will destroy me shortly."

ENTOR opened his eyes. Lifting his head slightly, he looked at the tubes running from under concealing covering on his chest to the glistening cabinet beside his cot.

He tried to move an arm; when it refused to respond he looked and saw that both arms were securely strapped. His eyes grew bleak. He let his head fall back on the pillow slowly.

"He's awake," Imray said.

Entor closed his eyes. "Yes, I'm awake," he replied, bitterly.

"Didn't you know that you couldn't succeed in suicide with us right there to get things moving to save you?" Vanner asked.

A wry smile seeped into Entor's slack lips. "It was a good gamble; by driving the knife directly into my heart I knew I would empty of blood before anything could be done. Then, perhaps, some of the fine vessels in my brain would collapse and refuse to take plasma; my mind would be dead."

"Well, it didn't succeed," Gordon said. "You can't die until we decide on it."

"Why did you try it?" Vanner asked. "It isn't like you. I can conceive of you plotting to liquidate all the rest of us so that the brain could build the weapon and tune it to your mind. I can conceive of you, discovered as you were, bluffing it out or fighting it out—seeing the one chance and fighting toward it as you have always done all your life. But I can't see you giving up."

"Leave him alone, Vanner," Imray ordered; "let him rest until morning, when we can let Lillis, Kazam, and Rial in on this."

"All right," Vanner sighed. He sat up suddenly. "We forgot about the blood; we'd better clean that up."

"You do it," Imray said.

Gordon left the room and hurried to a janitor closet. He wheeled out a rug-cleaner of a type that shot fine jets of heated cleaning-solvent into the mat and immediately sucked it back up through a filter. He wheeled it down the hall, plugged it in; he started it up, then shut it off, studying the blood on the rug.

Abruptly he hurried back along the hall to the inner sanctum and burst through the door. "We forgot about Ahnja; from the signs she slipped on the blood when she came home from the play."

"We can decide about that later," Imray said; "get the blood cleaned up."

Entor opened his eyes, saw Gordon leave the room, then closed them, sighing. When he opened them again it was morning. The five were in the room, talking in subdued voices. The Council surgeon appeared from out of his range of vision and laid a white enamel pan with steaming soapy water in it on the stand...

"All right, doctor," Lillis' voice sounded loudly. "We'll let you know at once if he wakes up."

Entor opened his mouth to tell them he was awake...

"Is the gas out of the room?" a muffled voice said.

"Yes," Lillis' voice sounded clearly; "you can take the masks off now."

There was the sound of heavy breathing from several pairs of lungs.

"Beakhus!" Rial's voice came from faraway. "No wonder he tried to kill himself. I think he might have even if you three hadn't been suspicious and kept an eye on that door during the time Ahnja was out."

"Well," Gordon's voice sounded, closer. "We know now."

ENTOR lay still, keeping his eyes closed.

"The question now is—what do we

do about Entor?" Gordon went on. "I think we should take a vote before he wakes up."

"Too late," Entor said, opening his eyes; "I'm awake. Why didn't you ask me to tell you what went on in my interview with the brain? I would have told you."



"We could never have been sure it was the truth," Lillis said. "But now that you're awake, have you anything you want to say before we vote on whether to liquidate you?"

"I would just like to ask one thing," Entor replied weakly. "If you vote to eliminate me, what course do you propose to follow toward the Federation afterwards?"

"There *is* only one course," Lillis said vehemently.

Entor looked from one face to another, reading the same answer in each. "Go ahead and vote," he said dully, closing his eyes.

"Before we vote," Rial said, "I want to point this out. We can't afford to have a weak link, and this is what Entor will definitely be, from now on. What we have ahead of us is a far more dangerous course than any before; we can't afford to take chances."

"There isn't any argument there, so far as it goes," Imray agreed. "But what about keeping him as a figurehead and excluding him from our councils?"

"He'll be a much better figurehead dead," Lillis argued. "One of us five will have to become the new Leader. In time he will supplant Entor as the figurehead—just as Entor supplanted the memory of Marcus, when he was liquidated twenty-seven years ago."

Entor's fingers slowly clenched into fists; small beads of perspiration

gathered on his forehead, his cheeks... "Shall we vote now?" It was Rial's voice...

"**W**AIT FOR me, darling!" Ahn-ja pleaded.

Reed turned in time to see her squeeze between two bundle laden women, reaching out to rescue her hat as one of the bundles scraped it from her head.

"It's your fault," she said tartly as she joined him. "You would dilly-dally until the last three days of Christmas shopping."

"Keep your hat on," Reed chuckled; "let's grab a paper and go in that restaurant up ahead, out of this madness."

Coin and paper changed hands expertly. Reed steered Ahnja, and abruptly the bedlam was replaced by the unhurried serenity of the dining room.

"Want part of it?" Reed asked after they had settled down.

"The cartoons," Ahnja said. "I want to see how— Oh, look at the headlines. The Council for Freedom—"

"Forget about it," Reed said sternly; "here's the cartoons."

"But won't it develop into a galactic war?" Ahnja asked worriedly. "After all, how can you be *sure*?" Her eyes were troubled. "Entor died that night, I think. It was *his* blood—and right after that it was announced that he had died of a heart-attack. Rial is dictator now. *He* was never under the influence of—"

"But he *was*," Reed said gravely. "It knew what it was doing, and would never suffer destruction until it was certain. The Council for Freedom will never precipitate a galactic war; it knows too clearly what would happen. As with a long succession of power-combines before it, it has learned that the only way it can survive is to have an enemy—in its case, the Federation. That enemy serves as the reason for the integrated economy, the

war-footing that engages a couple of billion young men, and all the industry necessary to support such a civilization, and keep it going."

"But I forgot," Ahnja said; "the Federation wouldn't fight. It would let the Council for Freedom take over."

"No," Reed said. "That could never happen, either; the Federation must have an enemy too, to hold together. Strange, isn't it. One man dreams of conquest, power and more power, until he stands supreme over all, Dictator of Mankind. Another dreams of a paradise where there are no wars and no enemies, where people can live in freedom from all fear and all want. And sometimes it's forgotten that the ultimate extreme of each dream is sociological stasis. They forget—then there is danger of all-out war as each set of dreamers feels the urge to achieve their dreams."

"Then," Reed said quietly, "Mankind had need of the advice of something greater than itself to set it straight again."

"I know," Ahnja said.

Reed cleared his throat loudly. "I suppose you've been wondering what's in this parcel I picked up at the special order department?"

"Mm hmm!" Ahnja said.

"Your Christmas present, darling," Reed said. "Your first, since they

(If you haven't read the department, "It Says Here", turn to page 8 for details on our "All the Answers" contest.)

don't have Christmas where you grew up. I was going to wait until Christmas Eve to give it to you, but I think now would be a better time."

He took it out of his pocket and gave it to her. She slit the tape on the wrapper and unwrapped it. It was a small square box of the type that sound recorded volumes came in.

When she read the title on it she burst into tears.

"Ahnja!" Reed said, rising hastily and starting around the table.

"I'm all right," she said. "C-can't a girl cry once in a while if she wants to?" She pushed him away and sniffed herself under control, then picked up the box and looked at it, her eyes bright. "*The Life and Times of Will Rogers*," she read. "*Translated from the original Americanese by Peer Smit.*"

Her hand reached across the table and stole into his. "Thank you, Reed," she said softly.

And five hours later her hand again stole out and crept into his as the voice over the loudspeaker said, "*And so Will Rogers died. The man who more than once said, 'I never knew a man I couldn't like.' But he lived on in the hearts of men, the man whom no one ever knew without loving.*"

"That's Will," Ahnja whispered as the loudspeaker became silent. "That's Will..."



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Carson recognized this as an old Martian spaceship

The Thought-Control Board was lenient with Walter Carson; he wasn't locked up in a psycho-camp, because of his theories — he only had to recant them, publicly. But when he forced them down the throats of the populace, the Board had to use subtler measures. So . . . Carson found himself officially a hero of science, sent off into space to test his claims, as he wanted. Only, it wouldn't be exactly the kind of test he needed; after all, the Board wasn't obligated to insure his success . . .

THE SEVEN SECURITIES



INSTEAD of having Walter Carson locked up in the Regional Psychopathic Center, with those others who had expressed the belief that a jet-cruiser could reach Jupiter—or even Saturn—and return, the Thought-Control Board sentenced him to recant in public. Such leniency was because of Flora, Carson's wife.

Stereotelevisors had been set up to broadcast the medieval ceremony. With hieratic gestures, inquisitors set the traditional dunce-cap on Carson's head. Twelve men, armed with ancient Springfield rifles and wearing quaint, high-collared olive-drab uniforms of

1917, marched him from the administration building to a seven-hundred-year-old Cadillac phaeton. This was archaic pageantry; there was no thought of preventing escape. Patrol shells, hovering a yard above the pavement, covered the procession with force-projectors; these were needless.

Carson, looking at the faces of the Standard Citizens who crowded against cables stretched waist high along the avenue, saw not one friend.

He felt their hatred—the purely impersonal resentment of a Standard Citizen for any Ten-Percenter; it billowed, wave on wave, like something tangible. These were a well-fed people. At first glance, one would take them to be uniformly handsome; on second glance, it would be clear that they were quite too uniform, not in the details of their features, but their expressions. Though they had many

outward semblances of individuality, they were thought-controlled by a central intelligence. This was because they liked it that way; it gave them a feeling of security.

The ceremonial car crawled along. In response to thought-force projections the crowd reviled and jeered Carson, dutifully. It was, however, forbidden to throw rotten eggs, tomatoes, or pop-bottles; the original finish of the ceremonial car was not to be jeopardized.

After thrice circling the plaza, the vehicle swung into the square, to halt at the foot of a truncated pyramid draped with the national colors. The guards herded Carson to the uppermost terrace; a brass band, whose instruments were normally kept on display in the Administration Museum, sounded off the national anthem.

Then, when members of the curator's staff had done going from musician to musician with swabs and spray guns, neutralizing saliva that might otherwise corrode the sacred relics, electronic organs pealed a prodigious harmony. Vocalizers gave the words in pure, clear tones such as no human throat had ever achieved since that ancient day when the anthem had been composed. The crowd stood at attention as the electronic throat articulated, "...the land of the free, and the home of the brave..."

Then silence.

Taking a step forward, Carson began to recite what the Thought-Control Board had prescribed: "I am at last aware of the absurdity and the impossibility of my plans. I regret sincerely that, ever for an instant, I wished that I had been right. I am grateful to the Thought-Control Board for this opportunity to beg you, my friends, to avoid Wrong Thought."

He stood, head bowed, hands clasped before him.

The deep, the mellow utterance of the vocalizer, whose timbre had been preserved from ancient times by those who knew that the then-living speaker's voice could never in future ages

be equalled, thereupon addressed the penitent: "Walter Carson, you will now recite the Scientists' Creed."

Carson responded, "*I believe in the existence of e, in the method of Least Squares, and in the Theorem of Mean Values. I believe that the Mean Value is that value which is as likely as not to be exceeded. I believe in the Theory of Limits, and in the Infinite Series, and in the Thought-Control Board, world without end, amen!*"

The vocalizer said, "My friends, Walter Carson has paid his debt; he is not to be subjected to violence of ridicule. However, it is not compulsory to fraternize with him. You may disperse."

The guard went to the museum to surrender uniforms and weapons. The musicians followed. The crowd dispersed; Carson, ignored, went home alone, and afoot.

HE WAS medium-sized, neither slouching nor carrying himself erect. He had medium hair, and medium features, though these had a significant angularity. There was something non-uniform about the mouth and the deep-set eyes; instead of the petulance, the soft arrogance of the Standard Citizen, they signalled individuality. The very essence of being a Ten-Percenter was asserting—at least passively—his status as one of the un-secure, the un-protected, the self-sufficient. These unregimented ones, unguarded ones, were called Ten-Percenters because of their ancient relationship to the number of those in the majority group; there were fewer of them now, but the tag persisted.

In return for freedom from thought-control, and freedom from compulsory security, the Ten-Percenter worked longer hours, and without observing any prescribed limit on his production or efficiency; and his group were so heavily taxed that they supported the

Standard Citizen, whose un-holidays were no more than sufficient to give him an illusion of productivity—necessary for his mental tone and integrity. Inevitably, the Standard Citizen despised the Ten-Percenters whose creativeness and gluttony for work made the four-hour day and the two-day working week possible for the majority.

But both sides felt that they were getting a bargain.

Except for Flora, Carson would have been hustled off to that heavily-guarded spot in the badlands of the Dakotas, built as a permanent shelter for men who believed that by proper design of reactors, disintegrators and tubes, the standard space-jet could reach far beyond the established Martian cruising lanes; that Jupiter—and even Saturn—were attainable goals, in the round trip, not the one-way, no return, sense.

Most of the inmates of the Center had been there so long that they babbled happily as they made little plastic models of generators and propulsion-tubes, or scribbled on the walls of their cells. Each had a set of equations and formulae for achieving better fuels, and more efficient fuel-disintegration. Modelling was considered a valuable occupational-therapy—though none were ever discharged as cured.

One—a former space-admiral—neither scribbled nor made miniature jet-cruisers; he was in a straight jacket. A thought-inspector had caught him with drawings of a ship to reach trans-Neptunian planets, and the admiral, instead, of recanting, had shouted, "Damn it, it will work!"

Carson, then a space-man down on his luck, had taken a job as guard at the Psychopathic Center. When he quit, he left with copies of the scribbles on the walls. That so many madmen agreed in principle had set him wondering as to the status of the Thought-Control Board.

The Board concentrated on outstanding people. There was little effort

directed toward culling what individualists—potential individualists—existed among the masses. The ninety-percent welcomed control; its final and supreme gift was freedom from the pains of thinking along unexplored paths. The individuals of this great majority had an intelligence—as far as mere intellect was concerned—so high that any mill-run specimen would have been rated a genius, in the twentieth century. There was merely aversion to facing any risk from use of that intelligence.

Nor was there anything fancy about the Ten-Percenter's I.Q.; the difference was in his attitude. He preferred his own mistakes, or the penalties thereof, to the well-being that came from another's guidance; he had no fear of being underprivileged.

The very pressure of regimented minds squeezed heretics into the open; spying was not necessary. The mechanized dullness of human robots goaded the Ten-Percenter, actual or potential, into self-assertion; the system had become automatic, over the centuries.

As he walked, vibration-impacts pounded Carson's brain. These psychic waves were tuned to be the frequency of brain and nervous system. Whenever his vigilance lagged, or when he was weary, he was unable to exclude the incessant hammering of the thought-broadcast, projected from standard recordings.

*"Freedom from want... freedom from fear... freedom from thought...
...The Nine Freedoms and the Seven Securities..."*

AFTER quitting his position at the Psycho Center, Carson found work at the Venusian Spaceways Shops. Secretly, he made models.

He was a quiet, likeable chap; he had ability, including the necessary and vital one of yessing the right people while thinking his own thoughts.

Having graduated from the right school helped. What had done things for him, however, was marrying a pleasant, colorless, and distant relative of the ruling family.

Flora was no prize; she was without even the charm which certain homely women have, and not homely enough to be cute. Yet, he found her kind, unobtrusive, unobnoxious—and grateful. Carson was promoted, and because of Flora's family, the tax on Ten-Percenter was not levied as strictly as it would have been otherwise.

His salary, thus unplundered, soon became large enough to enable Carson to support Flora on a scale equal to that of the Standard Citizen. Moreover, he was able to buy sufficient quantities of thorium, tantalum, and other controlled substances he needed, on the black market.

Carson ended by proving what he had suspected long before quitting the job of guarding unorthodox admirals and space-men: that the problem of trans-Martian, perhaps even trans-Saturnian flight had been solved.

Flora was not excited when he came home. "How was it, darling? Dreadful as you expected?"

He shook his head. "I had it coming for running off with my big mouth; if it hadn't been for you, I'd be halfway to Dakota now."

"But now you know better?" she asked, solicitously.

Carson studied for a moment. "Yes, sugar, now I know better."

"I'm so glad," Flora said, contentedly; her life would be more secure now.

Of course, she had entirely missed Carson's meaning; he knew a better way of putting his idea across, now. Several nights later, he was ready to test it; he would win, or face the blast of a disintegrator-squad. No comfortable cell, with nice, clean walls and lots of crayons for scribbling.

He got a central-communications man thoroughly drunk on contraband Venusian brandy that was silky-

smooth, innocuous-seeming, yet active as a brace of volcanos. Taking the man's identification-card and tool-kit, Carson made his way to the information-building. The outer guards passed him without question; once in the tall tower, he walked confidently and inconspicuously to the room where the night staff was at work.

Some were preparing thought-tapes for projection; others were modulating the frequency. Graphic indicators showed the moment-by-moment datum-plane of public thought. Though much of the process was automatic, human selectivity was needed to pick from the stock of patterns that idea-equivalent to which members of the democracy would be most receptive, at a given period. The "fear" and "greed" motifs were the most infallible, though Terrestrial. Democracy's Superiority was a runner up.

No one paid much attention to Carson when he stepped into a corner, knelt, and opened his tool-kit; he had his back to the staff-men. He took out a compact respirator, fitted it to his face, then opened the valve of the compressed-gas cylinder which occupied most of the kit. The whirr of instruments, and the hum of laminations which pervaded the office, masked the hissing of the anaesthetic as it escaped; it was a propane derivative which had little warning odor, if any.

The result was total blackout. Some crumpled in front of the instrument-panels; others went limp across their desks. A few slid from their chairs to sprawl like bundles of rags on the floor.

Protected by the neutralizing-respirator, Carson set to work, preparing the tape which he would feed into the thought-vibration projectors, and which would simultaneously be broadcast orally.

"Trans-Martian navigation is possible. The Administration prevents exploration beyond Mars because of fear that discovery of new sources of

wealth, and new standards of living, would make you less dependent upon it for security. While the Venusians and Martians have been found to be inferior in their civilization, there is always the grave risk that further exploration would bring you in contact with people whose greater social advantages, higher order of security, more copious endowment of comfort, luxury, and convenience would make you discontented with the present hierarchy.

"I, Walter Carson, know all this to be true. I, Walter Carson, have plans for space-navigation, and the search for a more abundant life."



HE HAD picked an appeal which would stir the Standard Citizen. As an in-law of an obscure cousin of the ruling clan, whose ancient name won it a ninety-percent majority at every election, Carson could not well be locked up in the Psychopathic Center; such would imply that Flora had been sub-caliber in marrying him. And that would prove awkward if, one day, she were called upon to campaign in favor of some equally obscure-kinsman when he ran for the office of Supreme Bureaucrat.

It was necessary that an obscure member of the clan occasionally hold office—not only to promise new and splendid benefits, but to prove that even the most strongly-entrenched must finally fall beneath a landslide of votes.

The Political Bureau, however, had an answer for Carson's case; they made a scientist-hero of him. They assigned him to command the *Hyperion III*. She was to be refitted with power-tubes of the sort he had designed. Exploration bonds were issued; there were drives. The Supreme Bureaucrat appeared with Carson, on the

truncated pyramid, and asked the official hero to recant his recantation; Carson recanted, and the electronic vocalizers sang the national anthem.

The *Hyperion III* was a splendid cruiser. Her beryllium shell had been armored with chromium alloys, tough and hard enough to resist the fragments which swarmed in the asteroid belt. "This intrepid explorer of Trans-Martian space," the thought-projectors announced, "will conserve fuel by driving through the asteroid belt, instead of rising above its orbit. He will avoid burning out tubes and injectors; this will reduce the running time to the necessary minimum. Conservation of fuel will permit the return trip.

"There will be applause and demonstration whenever Walter Carson appears in public."

Carson then met the Bureaucrats in council, privately. "Gentlemen, this is strictly confidential. I shall consider it so, if you grant the request."

"Anything you want, Walter, old boy!" The Supreme Bureaucrat regarded him with unfeigned admiration. "You've opened our eyes with your daring and drastic approach; we believe in you."

"For a crew, I want those spacemen and space admirals you have locked up in Dakota. This is a dangerous cruise; until I have experts to man the *Hyperion*, I have not a Lunnarian's chance of returning."

"Now, listen, old man. I am awfully sorry—we are awfully sorry—most profoundly and intensely sorry—but proving that you are sane and entirely right, after your original recantation, was difficult. Thought-Control *does* have its limits; it would not be democratic, having the *Hyperion* manned by high brass."

"Your Excellency," Carson retorted, "I don't know what would be more democratic than having space-

captains putting on hot suits to crawl into slag-blocked tubes at 3000° Centigrade, and reaming them out in flight. I can't think of a sweatier slug than wearing lead-alloy armor while doing a trick on the thorium-reduction stage. The thorium ore you put into the bunkers for this flight is messy stuff; it will take good men to handle it."

"No, Walter; you do not understand. There has to be a Citizen crew—Standard Citizens; the norm of Democracy. You will be the only Ten-Percenter aboard."

"Damn it, I won't take off with dopes and zombis!"

"You'd take off in a Lunarian jetoglide if you had the chance. And don't push your luck too far; you know, you could lose you in-law immunity. There are ways. Now be a good fellow before we get tough with you."

The other Excellencies nodded affirmation. Carson knew, now, that he had underestimated the politicians from the start.

BY THE time take-off day arrived, the crew members were so hopped up with thought-blasts that they went aboard willingly. Carson did not like their faces; no sooner was the *Hyperion* in full flight when he quit the bridge and went to his cabin. He thrust a four-by-six-centimeter record-block into the microvox, punched off the index number of each crew man, and snapped the key. The microvox, selecting from the 50,000,000 dossiers in the record, gave him the history of each man.

When the machine was silent, Carson sat back and let out a deep breath. "Thieves, pimps, cut-throats, and scum of the earth," he summed up. Then, cursing fiercely, he got up and rapped smartly on the bulkhead. "All right, Alec, we're clear."

Alec Tweed, the Ten-Percenter he

had smuggled aboard, was about Carson's build. The difference was in the china blue eyes, coffin-shaped face, and straw-colored cowlick. His teeth were stained from chewing Venusian *tarol*. He grinned, spat a greenish jet at the bulkhead, and hitched his belt. "Bad a crew as you figured?"

"Worse. I wouldn't sign up such trash to man a grocery-pickup on a clear day." He stepped into the locker from which Tweed had emerged, and took a gunbelt from the peg. "Won't have any mutiny till we're past the Martian base, but no harm keeping strict watch now."

Tweed knifed a chunk of *tarol* from his plug, studied it, and fitted it behind his molars. The stuff was strong; stained saliva, creeping down the bulkhead, was cutting the lacquer. "Might maroon those bugger-luggers in the Martian desert," he suggested, "and get a native crew. They're good mechanics; brains haven't been addled by thought-control. Don't see anything immoral about doing a day's work, or taking an order."



Carson thrust another record block into the microvox. The voice recited from the "Terrestrain Penal Code, Title VII," *It is expressly forbidden to put a Standard Citizen Spaceman ashore anywhere except in his home port, notwithstanding that he may have refused duty, or is incompetent. The owner and/or commander responsible shall suffer death by disintegration, and in addition, shall forfeit all social security.*

Carson punched other keys. The voice resumed, *Arbitrary, harsh, or unreasonable commanders may, by vote of the crew, be provisionally ma-*

rooned, and the ship navigated to the nearest port by the Senior Standard Citizen aboard. But if the investigating commission finds that this authority has been unreasonably exercised, the said Senior Standard Citizen will be deprived of ten days social-seniority, and fined ten pazoors. These penalties shall be increased by fifty percent if the provisionally marooned commander and/or officers do not survive.

Tweed yawned. "I had all that read to me at the Space Academy."

"I thought maybe you'd slept through the reading." Then, "You know why our course was ordered to lead through the asteroid zone?"

"Certainly," Tweed answered. "To make sure we'll not get through; that'll dispose of you. Flora will be the widow of a hero. She'll hand out high decorations to the nearest of kin of all these tramps that would have faced the disintegrator-squad long ago, if they hadn't been politically right. Hell, Walt, I knew all that before I came aboard; the only question is, how'll we carry on?"

Carson countered, "Notice those faces?"

Tweed nodded. "Punchy from thought-jolts; don't know the danger yet. All they're thinking of is how soon they'll be back to retire on double pay. As long as there's nothing messy like reaming and drifting a propulsion-tube, there'll be only ordinary sloppiness to contend with."

Carson frowned. "Unless they get griped with the recreation facilities, or don't like the snack bar."

"One thing I forgot to ask."

"What?"

"How are you going to account for me?"

Carson lifted the bench-cover, exposing a good-sized locker. It was comfortably upholstered and well-ventilated. The under side of the cover had a viewing screen; this was tied into the televisiphone intercom hookup. "Cramped, but no worse than

the bunks of the old X-43's." He dipped into a sub-compartment and got out a uniform and a plastic mask. "Put these on."

The mask was a perfect replica of Carson's face. "So far," he continued, "they've had no real chance to become sure of my voice; they don't know yours. They'll hear first one, then the other, right from the start, so won't pay attention to any difference they might notice."

Tweed grimaced appreciatively. "It'll be fun, watching them wonder when the skipper sleeps. What chance of the steward catching me coming in or out of my hideout?"

"The cabin door answers to a single equation, but it can be set to open only to a pair of equations. One more thing. Quit chewing *tarol*."

"Too bad, skipper." Tweed dipped into his kit. "Here's a plug; you better start chewing. Easier to get your teeth greenish than to bleach mine."

"Oh, all right—but I think I'd rather have mutiny," Carson grumbled, as he went to the bridge.

THEODOLITES were trained on Jupiter, Mars, and Venus. Electronic calculators converted the data into triaxial coordinates. The helmsman scanned a radar screen, alert for meteorites, space-craft, and uncharted derelicts. Carson glanced at the progress-graph; already, the moon loomed up larger.

He went below, making the rounds, inspecting signal-devices and space-rafts. All was well in the propulsion-tube compartment. The low grade fuel was burning clean; the blast of the port and starboard tubes made a purple-white wake some ten miles long. Intermittently, the directional-deflector jets flared, nudging her back on her course. The very smoothness of everything, the smoothest performance Carson had ever seen, infuriated him: speed, low fuel consump-

tion, tight control combined with flexibility, owed little or nothing to *him*. A few of the finishing touches were his, no doubt about that—but the basic equations had come from the scribblings of men in the Psychopathic Center. But for the politicians, all this could have been achieved years ago—and by the men who had had the first vision of it all.

The First Officer, Garrett, might do in a pinch. He had smuggled Martians to Venus, and political rightness had got him off with a suspended sentence for a payroll-holdup. Yet Garrett had rebelled, even if only against the ethical codes of the Thought-Control; in some respects, only his basic dishonesty kept him from being a Ten-Percenter.

By the time Mars loomed up, with its rust-red hills and its scraggly, red vegetation, officers and crew were surly. For several days, they had resorted to every subterfuge to find out when the skipper slept. When they learned that there was not a single complete hour in the twenty four in which a man could get away with anything, they felt that they were being oppressed.

Space-guards put out to meet the *Hyperion*. Signal-lights blinked; braking-tubes flared. Slowly, she sank to the landing port, to be made fast to the latticework mooring columns. The mayor of Galgorra offered the keys of the city to the skipper who, after inspection and refitting, would venture into further space.

"Go out and meet him," Carson said to Tweed. "Give everyone ground leave. I'm staying aboard, just in case of sabotage." And after a pause, "Oh, by the way, Alec!"

"Yes?"

"Come back drunk,—but not as drunk as you appear to be!"



WHEN TWEED came back from the reception, Carson asked, "How was it? What's the crew doing?"

"The usual official muck. We're Argonauts of space, and such like journalese nonsense. But the morale—speaking of the crew, now—seems OK. Once it was over, they all got busy fraternizing. . . . You look as if you'd been thinking yourself into knots."

"There is this," Carson said, frowning. "When the thought-jamming wears off, standard notions will come to the surface and then we are likely to smell hell. I'm going on the prow now." Carson indicated the screen. "I made some changes in the intercom system. It will work with infra-red rays; none of the crew knew about it. That way, you can look into every compartment and without visible light. Handy in case of sabotage in the dark."

"You're going to do some fraternizing now?"

Carson nodded. He took a plastic mask from the locker and fitted it once. Once Tweed had got a good look, Carson took it off again. "When I am out of the space port," he explained, "this will make me look like any Terrestrial space tramp."

At the entrance of the port, Carson hailed one of the surface-shells recently imported from Terra. He had been too busy refitting the *Hyperion* to have had any time for personal vehicles. There was scarcely a hum when the chauffeur activated the pulsors.

"Licensed to leave the lanes?"

The Martian driver grinned over his shoulder, and pointed at the card fixed above the instrument panel. "Unlimited, mister."

Carson made an elbow-bending gesture. "Know any good spots?"

"Only the best. Galgorra's a dump, compared to Askala; you wait."

Red earth. Mountains eroded to mere hummocks. Fields of reddish vegetation. Lakes, mineral-tinged, watered the farm settlements. Each year, there was further extension of the red-spined tamarisks which made windbreaks to check soil-erosion; this planet was so old that reviving it was a pioneer's feat. The Martians were getting into the spirit of things nicely. Their status would be improved, materially; but they'd become dependents of the government.

Far off, the metal towers of an opencast mine twinkled in the sinking sun. Long trains of sleds, loaded with low grade fuel-ore, snaked over the plain to a processing plant. This was old stuff to Carson—but this time it was new. Always before, Mars had been a destination, not a jumping-off place.

Some of the low ridges had forms that could hardly be geological; he saw domes with a metallic lustre peeping up from dunes. As he neared these traces of what were reputed to be ruins of antiquity, it became ever more difficult to distinguish them from outcroppings of rock.

Here and there were metal constructs, caked with a glistening film of oxide: alloys that prospectors from Terra had not yet considered worthy of salvaging, because the refractory stuff did not suit any known process or purpose.

"I'd swear *that's* what's left of a rocket ship, over there."

"Could be," the chauffeur agreed. "Want a look? Hardly any of you Terrans bother with stuff like that, just to be looking."

"For the fun of it, idle down and circle it slowly." —

The chauffeur lifted the canopy. Sand, driven by the whining wind, made a dry rustling sound; fine grains stung Carson's cheeks like the first tingle of sunburn.

The repulsor slacked off and the shell went into a slow glide. The great metal cylinder, half-burned in sand, had been gutted. Instead of whistling, the wind which played through it made deep drumming and booming sounds. The metal was dotted with irregular dark chunks, which had hit so hard that there had been melting and alloying at the point of contact. As far as Carson could see, the hull had not crashed; it had apparently lain for ages, abandoned, outmoded, unneeded.

"Always been there," the chauffeur volunteered, and swung back on the run to Askala. "You see them here and there, sticking up out of the sand, until they're buried again by the next moves of the dunes. Where'd you say you wanted to go when you got to Askala?"

"Where do the crews usually go? This is my first trip."

"I'll show you."

Sinking to the slow lane, he idled down into the glow of vapor-tubes which became momentarily more conspicuous as darkness closed in to take possession of the red planet. Setting her down, the driver handed Carson a card. "Put in a call for Igor when you're ready to go back. Now, right across from the parking stand—see the sign—that's the *Spaceways Rendezvous*. Reasonable. Over there, that's the *Silver Palace*, and *Luna Tavern*. Show 'em my card, and they'll treat you right. Cash your checks without any trouble. Nice people. There's some of the crowd that landed today—think they're bound for Jupiter—maybe they are."

CROSSING the street, Carson had no difficulty in avoiding three crewmen of the *Hyperion*. The varied colors of the glow-tubes hampered observation. Stepping into a darkened

doorway, he slipped on the skin-textured plastic mask which had the effect of skillfully applied makeup. It was film-thin, except where it changed the contour of nose and cheekbone and chin.

Disguised, he stepped into *Luna Tavern* after the three spacemen. Voices and electronic music shook the resort; the sing-song tones of Martian competed with the nasal speech of Terrans, and the sibilant subtleties of Venusian speech.

Terrans from the ships, the mines, and the trading-posts crowded the place. Terrestrial women were scarce. The travellers, however, found no shortage of amiable Martians.

Carson got a booth adjoining the one which the trio from the *Hyperion* had selected—Landis, Roswell, Parker—drinking, but not drunk.

"How does it all stack up, so far?" Landis demanded, when they had been served, and the waiter left them to approach Carson.

"Everyone's a bit too nice to us," Roswell grumbled.

"You'd gripe if they were hanging you with a brand new rope."

"They don't expect us back," Landis said.

"Who says so?" Parker demanded.

"Well...no one, not in so many words," Landis answered. "It's the way they look at us. And the voices."

"Come to think about it," Parker admitted, "it has been different this time."

Roswell got back in. "I don't know enough of this lingo to talk it, but I caught words that just now begin to fit together."

"Such as?"

"We'll get hammered to junk, out in the asteroid belt."

"Oh, the hell we will! We're equipped for that... How'd these monkeys know, anyway?"

"They act as if they did."

"No Martian ever acted as if he knew anything."

"This was a she—the mayor's secretary."

"What'd she say?"

"Something about an oldtime yarn about how the natives used to fly to Jupiter, thousands of years ago. Then it became a lost art."

"You know...the more I think of it, the more I'm for jumping ship."

"And miss your bonus and retirement?"

"Getting socked with an asteroid is retirement without bonus."

"You'd get picked up if you jumped ship. There's not a chance," the veteran, Parker, declared. "Garrett tried it once."

This was something that had been omitted from the first officer's dossier, Carson told himself, as he grimaced and gulped his tamarisk gin.

"If the old man got cold feet," one began, hopefully.

"That knothead hasn't sense enough to change his mind," Roswell growled; "we must've all been doped to get us signed up."

As far as Carson could remember, this was the first piece of clear and independent thinking that any Standard Citizen had ever done. Unfortunately, it came at the wrong time.

"...if something happened so we'd have to put back to the shops to refit. ...well, that'd be grand, but you'd play hell pulling anything. ...the job is wired with alarms. ...hell, it's easy, jumping an alarm. ...who'd want to stay on Mars, even if he'd not be picked up. ...well, the liquor is rotgut, but I could go for some of the native gals. ...you can have 'em! they're not really human. ...what's the matter with that one over there? ..."

The "one over there", the Martian girl sitting by herself at the corner table, changed the direction of the talk.

"Looks like she's waiting for someone."

"She looks lonesome..."

"There's three of us...."

"Match to see...."

AS NEARLY as drifting smoke and the deceptive lights permitted Carson to see, the girl in the corner was not on the prowl for spaceway-pickups. She wore the usual tunic, which gave an exaggerated appearance of slenderness. Her features, finely-modelled, had the repose of a mask. However, the characteristically-slanted eyes were all alive. Her hands were unusually graceful, long and slender. Even for a Martian, her feet, shod with gilded sandals, were small. A velvet hood with spangles and pendants outlined the shape of her head; her blue-black hair was twisted into a gleaming knot at the nape of the neck.



Just another Martian—yet, somewhat different from all those others with glistening hoods, and painted fans, and tinkling ear-pendants.

Her glance shifted toward the door. The finely-pencilled brows moved as in recognition. But by then, the three spacemen had done matching to see who would be the lucky man; Parker crossed the small dance-floor to claim his prize.

An elderly Martian, wearing a skullcap, knee-length tunic, and flopping black pants, approached just in time to explain that his daughter was going home, and at once.

"Sit down, she's dancing with me," Parker announced.

The girl broke away from his grasp. Objecting, the old man got a backhanded slap that knocked him against a vacant table. Glassware spilled; he took a back flip over a chair. Two Martians pounced from a booth, to close in on Parker. Landis and Roswell came on the run. Superior in bulk, they knocked the two volunteers groggy.

The old man was trampled underfoot. A patrol came in from the street, and in time to keep the riot from becoming general; there were two Terrestrians and two Martians in the police party, all armed with shock guns and night sticks.

"Get back," they yelled, menacing the infuriated spectators. "These boys are visitors with the keys of Galgora." Then, to the girl, "All right, what the hell were *you* trying to get away with?"

This was something Carson had seen before; the victims of the brawl would be lucky if they did not land in jail. He yanked off his mask, thrust a patrolman aside, and caught Parker by the shoulder. "Put up your dukes and see how you like it!"

Carson measured the man and knocked him cold. Then, "You two, get him out of here and take him aboard."

The patrol, recognizing authority, made a swift change of front. "Get going," the chief said, "before I run you in."

Carson gave the old man a hand. "Come along, I'll call you a car."

"Thank you," he sing-songed. "Ours is waiting. Be pleased to come with us. We will take you wherever you may be going."

During the brief glide to the suburb in which they lived, Carson learned that Samgan and his daughter, Alani, worked in the offices of the mining company.

"Such things will happen," Samgan said, philosophically. "Merely one of the disadvantages of being near a spaceport." And then, when he had pouted several rounds of well aged tamarisk gin, smoky and smooth, the old fellow said, "Now, where do you wish to go? Alani will be happy to drive you."

The moons of Mars were rising when Alani cleared the outskirts of town. "I like you better without your

mask," she finally announced. "Why were you wearing it?"

Carson told her, and added, "If it hadn't been for the patrol, I'd've beaten those roughnecks loose from their eye teeth." Then gesturing toward the abandoned hull which had aroused his curiosity that afternoon, he changed the subject. "I was wondering about that. My chauffeur on the way out wasn't saying all he knew."

INSTEAD of answering at once, Alani swerved from the traffic-lane and swung toward the wreck. She set her cruiser down on a low dune near the shell, and raised the plastic dome.

"You'll freeze in this wind," Carson said, speaking as much for himself as for the girl.

She drew a robe from the compartment and whipped it about them both. "I'm used to the wind, but even so, this is more comfortable." Then, snuggling up, "For a Terrestrial, you're awfully civilized."

The masklike repose of the face was gone; her delicate features were all alive, magnolia-amber in the double moonlight. She was close enough to make it delightfully clear that the straight line effect of her tunic was purely an illusion of styling.

"You're dangerous bait, Alani. Quit looking at me that way."

Instead, the upturned lips reshaped to match the invitation of her eyes. Carson kissed her; she responded with an ardor that was new in his experience.

"Once more, and I won't stay civilized," he warned.

And since she had been kissing for keeps, he mentioned that he did have obligations back home. "I'm not surprised," she said. "And it makes no difference at all; I like you."

He pondered on both meanings. "You're pretty sure I won't be coming back—going back home? What do you know about that hull? It never was built by anyone on earth. Right?"

She nodded. "We are a very old people. A long time ago, when our planet was young, we travelled into space. To your planet; we were too crowded here then. Others went the way you are going; none of them came back."

"But those from earth did come back?"

"A few ships, yes. Those who didn't like it there."

"And your people ended by forgetting how to travel in space?"

"In a way, yes—no reason to leave. Poor fuel. And the scientists had all left, except a few. That simplified our lives; science was a mania with us for ages, till we became weary of it. Your people will learn, one day, perhaps—when your earth is old and feeble as ours is now."

"But we're bringing new life to Mars," he protested. "Trade benefits us both. The kind of people we send, well, that is something else, of course, but the trade itself—the work we're doing—"

"You are all amusing yourselves. Some of you are annoying us. Now, I guess you'll want to see the inside of the ancient hull."

She flung the light robe over her arm, and handed Carson a flashlight. The drifting sand was still warm; so was the metal shell, and its dark interior.



“WHERE'VE you been all this time?" Tweed demanded, when Carson finally stepped into the cabin.

"Studying trans-Martian space."

"You smell like it," Tweed scoffed, and plucked a long black hair from Carson's collar. "What did you hit Parker with?"

"Everything I had. Why?"

"He still doesn't know his own name."

Carson dipped into his pocket and took out a piece of smooth metal perhaps a quarter of an inch thick, and about the size of his hand. "Take a look at that," he said, and produced several egg-sized chunks of grayish ore.

"Where'd you get all this?"

Carson told him, and in concluding, demanded, "Ever see any fuel like this?"

"Neither did anyone else."

"Now take a good look at the bits fused into this piece of porthold shutter."

"Same stuff!"

"Catching on?"

Tweed nodded. "Meteorites, peppering the cruiser with the same kind of fuel she carried in her bunkers. Three times the specific gravity of anything we've ever seen before."

"The Martians," Carson resumed, "are enough like the modern Chinese to account for old legends of fire-breathing dragons. Dragons coming from the sky.... Nothing but the final flights of space cruisers that brought the beginnings of the Terrestrial-Chinese race to Asia. The Gobi was green and fertile, ages ago. A good spot to land. Alani's story makes sense."

"And this heavy ore fuelled them for the hop?"

"Very likely. They went to Jupiter—or beyond—to get it; that's what we're going to do."

"Letting the crew in on this?"

"Might buck up the morale."

"Oh, before I forget it, skipper."

"What?"

"Get yourself some solvent and take off that borrowed lipstick; it may be radioactive."

In the morning, Carson had all hands assembled. He told them of the evidence that ultra-Martian cruises had been made in the past: and that they would be getting their bonus for apparently pioneering in what had

been done so long ago that the knowledge of it persisted only in Terrestrial mythology. "The chance of a lifetime," he concluded, "to get something for nothing."

There was hearty cheering at this, and at the prospect of staking valuable ore claims.

At take-off time, Martians and Terrestrials gathered at the space port. Carson caught a glimpse of Alani, pressing against the cable that marked the limits of the safety zone. She was not expecting him back. But on his return, he would see her... for the last time. It would be better that way; it had to be that way. Yet, because of Alani, the Martians and their way of life had become very real to Carson. Insidiously, her words persisted in his mind: that the gadgets of science had become the master of Terrestrials, instead of their servant; and that the slave of toys and robots would inevitably be somewhat less than human, with manners to accord.

Then the jets roared, and the *Hyperion* rose on a column of flame. Carson was busy with his instruments until, well under way, he could quit them to turn to the latest charts of the asteroid belt.

There were more than 11,000 charted planetoids. The Martian observatory has added enormously to the number of those visible from Terra. Though most of the final 5000 were little more than chunks and pellets of planetary debris, there were large ones, also, which had escaped terrestrial observation. Astronomers were still divided: some flatly denied the existence of such anomalies—others solemnly explained.

THE GOING was worse than he had anticipated. The hull vibrated from the peppering of fragments long before the *Hyperion* came within the charted limits of the zone. The repulsion-field, however, mitigated damage from fragments too small to register on radar-screens.

The directional-jets got their first real workout. A good many asteroidal orbits proved to be more steeply inclined to the ecliptic than observation had indicated. The zone had at least as much extension in depth as in breadth.

There were dark bodies which, but for radar, would have knocked the *Hyperion* into a blob of incandescent vapor. She pitched and wove and yawed from the gravitational drag of spheres too-closely approached. Instead of the blackness of interplanetary space, there was a confusing haze.

From time to time, Carson took samples. "Planetary dust-bowl," he declared. "And the stuff is activated."

The *Hyperion* was not operating as efficiently as before; there was too much drag. The temperature of the compartments increased by fifteen degrees.

When he was not busy checking the radioactivity of spatial dust—with the idea of determining how much it might throw his instrument-observation out of balance—Carson kept an eye on the infra-red spying system. From time to time, he spotted groups in one compartment or another, huddled up in the dark. Intercom microphones brought no sound; the men were either whispering, or had used one of several simple tricks to block transmission.

Tweed grimaced and said, "Any jerk who wants to mutiny and take command ought to have his head examined."

"They don't know what a job navigation can be."

"I wish I knew what they are huddling up about. No telling what those knotheads might cook up.... And blow us up by mistake, themselves included, of course."

Carson's eyes narrowed. "Watch the infra-visor while I try something."

He stepped to the disaster-control panel and actuated solenoids that operated moveable bulkheads, which sealed off the various compartments.

Tweed exclaimed, "That broke it up! Man, man!"

"Keep watching."

Eye on the pressure-dial, Carson cracked a valve. There was a hissing and whining. "Hold it!" Tweed called, having recognized the sound. "They're blacking out. All but one—now he's out!"

Carson opened a purge-valve and fed in oxygen at the same time. The wake of the *Hyperion* trailed long as a comet's tail for a moment as the expelled gases flared up in the exhaust. The intercom buzzed, first officer, Garrett, was fairly babbling. Carson shouted, "Well, do something, mister! I'll be out directly."

He jerked the damage-control switch.

Tweed chuckled. "All clear. Now you hustle, and I'll listen."

The four spacemen were beginning to revive when Carson came to the now-lighted compartment. He was on Garrett's heels; the pharmacist's mate was dashing along with a first aid kit.

The half-conscious men were muttering and mumbling. "...it's got to work soon. ...we're finished if we don't go back. ...we've gone too far. ...they've got to clog up soon...."

The first to regain his wits sufficiently to realize that they had an outside audience let out a yell. "He's a damn liar! I didn't have a thing to do with it! I just happened to see them and came in."

"Dargan said it wouldn't be long—"

"I didn't either! I didn't say—"

In a few minutes, each crewman was insisting that he had not said anything. Carson demanded, "What were you fellows doing here?"

"We thought we heard a noise."

There was the drumming of interference-beats, the normal sound. Carson, however, caught a faint undertone; a manhole cover, not tightly secured, was vibrating. Instead of tak-

ing up on the handwheel, he slacked off, and lifted the cover. Fumes billowed out. A ruddy glow broke the darkness. Carson said to Garrett "Let's have a look."

ONCE IN their hot-suits, they entered the passageway. Holes had been drilled through the insulation, and into the exhaust-tube jacket. The tube itself had a dangerous glow: sparks showered up from it. The alloy was on the point of failing; it was on the durability of the metal that the entire cruise depended.

While there were spare tubes, the unexplained failure of even one would make it foolhardy to continue.

Garrett shook his head. "They're not standing up, sir."

Carson knelt and picked up some crystals scattered on desk. "Sulphur and salt," he said. "A pound of that, and the alloy is shot. Bad as putting lead on platinum. Some of these sons are trying to make me put about; you make it clear to whoever is up to tricks that I am not going back."

"I do not know who did it, and I do not want to know. If I did know, I'd have to give him Penalty VVI-A. Not even a Standard Citizen can get away with sabotage on that scale; the fumes could make the whole tube housing crumble."

Garrett's color changed. "I don't remember that from the manual."

"I know you don't, mister; this alloy was made up from a formula that didn't exist when the manual was printed. Unless you crave to finish your days aboard a space derelict, you put a stop to whatever is cooking. One thing more, Garrett!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Find out what the beef really is. Those fellows bumping their gums about the funny noise had a lot more on their minds than they wanted to spill. You can tell me—and mention no names."

An hour later, Garrett reported, "Self-luminous asteroids have got them worrying. They're about ready

to blow their head-gaskets; they think you're lost, and are too stubborn to admit it."

Carson sighed. "Those knuckle-heads might know there's nothing wrong with an asteroid's being self-luminous. They've been too busy reading too much muck written by astronomers who know nothing except what they *think* they see, while pratt-sitting in an observatory. Listen here—our radar beam could make some of these spit-balls glow; it is the *dark* ones that we have to worry about. We're not lost."



NOW THAT there had been a showdown, Carson brought Tweed from cover. The *Hyperion's* efficiency had been so impaired that there were only two choices: return to Mars for refitting, or land on an asteroid and do the work.

The gravitational-detectors presently indicated a mass quite out of keeping with established notions as to the size of asteroids.

"Unless the detector is haywire," Tweed declared, "we're nearing something a lot bigger than Ceres."

Frowning, Carson indicated the chart. "If this course we've plotted is anywhere near right, the gravitation of Ceres, Pallas, or Vesta can't have any such effect."

Tweed grimaced. "Difference between telescope-squinting, and getting out into things."

Then radar picked it up.

Carson stepped to the control-panel to give a change of course. Observational data, fed into the calculator, gave successive approximations of the mass and velocity of the sphere thus far visible only on the radar screen.

It became more and more like

ocean-navigation in dense fog, though the actual haze of planetary debris had diminished markedly during the past few hours. Jupiter, Mars, Venus came up sharply again in the theodolite cross hairs. The *Hyperion* was right on her course, but at half speed...quarter speed...and slower...approaching a body that no astronomer had charted.

The calculator gave the change of course to intersect the orbit. Carson signalled, "Resume speed."

At last, visual observation picked the objective: a dull globe which neither Terrestrial nor Martian telescopes could distinguish, except when it occulted a brighter body. The color tended toward grayish-lavender; its mass was fantastically out of proportion to its apparent size. The infrared detectors indicated radiation quite out of keeping with any Terrestrial determinations of an asteroid's probable temperature.

There were two distinct reflections of the radar-beam: one from the stratosphere, and another from the surface of the planetoid.

"Deep atmosphere, and dense," Carson remarked.

An occasional meteorite-trail confirmed the opinion.

Gravitational pull took effect earlier than instrumental-indications toward the sun, the *Hyperion* sank. The defectors shifted her clear of a body of water; friction heated the hull. Carson said to the intercom, "Make atmospheric tests, and report."

He got the first analysis soon after the *Hyperion* was sitting on her hydraulic landing-struts, on firm, hard footing. The pharmacist's mate wasn't sure of himself; he sounded as though he expected an order recheck.

Carson beckoned to Tweed. "Get a load of this." Then, "Ames, let's have that again. Never mind oxygen, nitrogen, CO₂, helium. Are you sure of that thoron figure?"

Ames repeated.

Carson said, "If you simply *had* to pull a boner, you'd've pulled something plausible. You could have got a sample tainted with exhaust fumes; try again."

Thoron—thorium emanation—had such a short life that its persistence in this amount indicated the presence of unheard-of quantities. This, however, proved to be only a minor oddity. The planet was warm, the air dense and moist. Beyond the open space in which the *Hyperion* had landed was vegetation of a lavender-grayish tinge, with a greenish undertone. Flights of birds rose from a distant lake. The sun, small and red, rose through swirling mists.

GARRETT and several of the crew debarked to get samples of air, water, earth; to make thermometric and barometric observations; and to take samples of vegetation. They were, however, to remain within two hundred yards' radius.

Later, the rest of the crew left the ship.

Carson was listening to the analysis of the samples Garrett had brought back, when—looking up—he saw human forms along the lake shore.

He said, "Recall all hands, mister; we don't want any incidents. And those men—" He gestured to a group gathered around a growth neither quite like the plantain stalk it appeared to be, nor yet like any tree he had ever before seen. "Whatever they're picking, there will be no eating until it's been tested."

For awhile, the human forms he had seen along the lake were obscured by a patch of scrubby forest. Presently, they came into view again; the first of the group was in procession, crossing the clearing.

Musicians led. They sounded off with wind instruments which suggested flutes and oboes. They had percussion-instruments also: small drums, discs of resonant metal, and rattles that rapped and swished. The scale

was pentatonic: an eerie, alien harmony, even stranger than the Martian music of which it reminded Carson.

Next, came men carrying banners; others had censers from the pierced metal covers of which poured smoke, pungent and fragrant, half-inviting, half-repulsive.

"Look like Martians," a man behind Carson muttered. "Same kind of faces."

Carson had noted this from the stature, gait, and posture of the visitors. All this confirmed what Alani had told him, that night under the moons of Mars. The skullcaps, the multicolored tunics, and the gilded twinkling headgear of the women, the sandals recalled that Martian evening. Most of all, it was the music and the chanting, so that thinking of Alani made him fancy that he could recognize her among the men and women who hung back from the procession.

Gradually, Carson began to understand words of the chant.

"Do you get it?" Garrett asked.

"They think," Carson answered, "that we are from the home of the gods. Keep the crew in ranks till I've had a parley; looks as if we have a good thing here, if we don't foul it up."

There was muttering as word was passed to the crew. Carson addressed them directly this time: "Pipe down! You jerks have been gods at government expense all your lives; try and act the part, just once. No telling what these people will do, or how they'll take it if they find out we are men like themselves."

"I don't see what those apes would use to make trouble with!"

Carson said to the speaker, "The fact that this bunch is unarmed doesn't guarantee they don't have weapons."

Tweed said from the corner of his mouth, "It'll be OK, Walt; these Standard Citizens are thinking and talking big to hide a streak of chicken."

The procession halted; the chant-

ing ceased. Carson stepped forward. Men in tunics and flopping black pants came to meet him. At every third step, they halted, bowed, and resumed the advance.

Others came from the rear of the procession, carrying trays; these knelt when their leaders halted, and held up gifts for Carson to inspect.

"We bow to the Exalted Ones who ride the Silver Dragon," the spokesman singsonged. "We welcome the Dragon and the Exalted Ones."

Carson answered, "We have come a long way; it is good to be here." Then, remembering Martian etiquette, he selected an item from each of the nine trays presented by the nine kneeling attendants. Once he had the plunder wrapped in his scarf, he bowed and said, "You may leave, and prepare for our visit."

The leader backed off, bowing.

The attendants backed off.

The musicians, moving backward, struck up their weird harmonies. After all had retreated nine paces, the procession countermarched, and made for the lake. The waiting crowd trailed after.

REJOINING the crew, Carson displayed the gifts. There were three pieces of fruit: a mango, a tangerine, and a plum. Then, three pieces of meat: the leg of a fowl; a chop; a filet of fish. Finally, a deep red, hexagonal gem, uncut, but burnished to brilliance; a small slug of heavy, yellow metal; a similar slug of bluish white metal, equally heavy. The last two had Martian symbols stamped upon them.

There was a crossfire of chatter, largely objections as to the skipper's having taken so little of the loot offered him, and, queries as to how the stuff was to be divided up.

Carson said, "I followed the Martian custom, and so did not grab everything on every tray—or even everything from one tray. You get away with that on Mars, because you have the whip hand, so no one bothers to set you right."

"Next, it seems we've been expected for centuries—thousands of years, perhaps; we tie in with some legend. The 'gods' business is not to be taken literally. It may be an extravagant compliment, rather than a religious term. It's easy to speak a language and not really know what the words actually mean.

"In some countries, gods eat; in others, they do not eat. Again, high-ranking gods just inhale the odor of grub, whereas junior or second-class gods *do* sink their teeth into the chow. Frankly, I do not know yet what we are supposed to be, or do.

"Finally, these gifts come from three kingdoms: animal, vegetable, and mineral. You'll notice that the meat is from three of the elements—air, earth, and water. Don't ask me why they didn't bring a water-lily, a sweet potato, and an orchid; I'm not psychic.

"Whether this gem is ruby, garnet—or just plain red quartz, I don't know.

"But one thing I damn well do know. If you start stealing, getting drunk, or making passes at women who belong to somebody else, we might end with our necks on the block. Just because these people didn't come at us with a show of weapons does not mean they do not have weapons as good as the few energy-guns we carry.

"That's all. Garrett, post a watch, and detail three men to go with me. There will be no liberty until I have looked things over; I'm going to return the visit."



A FEW DAYS after returning the visit of the natives, Carson found the wreck of a freighter whose hold was packed with ore. Vapor from the hot springs, and

chemical-exhalation from fumaroles that dotted the region, had reduced the hull to a paper-thin shell which collapsed from the weight of the layer of oxides. He inferred that the freighter had crashed because of power failure. Whether the colonists of the asteroid had been abandoned, or whether they had declined subsequent chances to return to Mars, was a question obscured by legend, and by difficulties of language. The only certainty was that the people had lapsed into what a Terrestrial would call barbarism.

They had few laws, and no ambition at all; their archaic code was based on good manners, rather than on moral tabus. Being without fear, they had—in the Terrestrial sense—neither law, morals, religion, nor war. Their observance in honor of the Tall Gods were motivated by politeness, rather than superstition or boon begging.

Now that ceremony had been attended to, and repairs to the *Hyperion* completed, Carson went back to the town—a settlement of small houses built of lava blocks. There were other such settlements. As nearly as he had been able to find out, the asteroid was thinly, though uniformly populated.

Carson's visit had more than sociability behind it; he had caught some of the crew coming back with loot from a grave-robbing expedition. No digging had been involved, since the natives had the custom of laying jewelry and amulets on the graves. Before making any move to restore the stuff, he wanted to find out whether the thefts had been discovered; if not, better say nothing until the last minute.

Kalgar, the chief elder, served mango-brandy in small earthenware cups. The stuff would have made first-rate fuel for an old-fashioned rocket. When Carson regained his breath, he said, "It is time for me to be frank with you. We are not gods; what is more, your liquor is not good for Terrestrials."

Kalgar, who reminded him very

much of Alani's father, was quite interested. "It doesn't seem to hurt you. Neither now, nor last time."

"A few more, and I'd fall on my face."

"So do we; that's why we drink it."

"Well, that's a pretty good reason," Carson agreed. "But some people don't fall on their faces soon enough. Instead they act like those pigs you roast so nicely. Pigs are edible, but a drunken Terrestrial hasn't even that much in his favor. Better sidetrack the brandy when the crewmen are around, and we'll all have a nicer visit."

"So far, there seems to have been no trouble about women. But while we're talking things over—"

Kalgar smiled, and gestured. "Ever since we heard your voices, we knew you were not gods. Also, we noticed that things had been taken from graves. Prowling animals take only the food we set out for the dead."

"But do not worry; we will replace those trifles. And what we call reserved women are always kept out of sight; the others—there will be no trouble about them at all."

Before he left, Carson learned about the yellow metal, and the white. The natives washed these from creek beds, melted the granules in thorium ore crucibles set over volcanic crevices. The ingots were hammered into slugs which served as a medium of exchange—though barter was more convenient, and a lot more fun.

Now that the overhaul-job was completed, Carson took off on a test-flight, circling the asteroid. Setting her down again, Carson arranged with Kalgar to have a gang of natives carry ore from the wreck to replace the low grade fuel the *Hyperion* had picked up at Galgorra. Refuelling by carrying ore in baskets was slow and inefficient, but this favored the crew; it gave them plenty of time for fraternizing. Kalgar, too polite to keep the liquor out of reach, diluted it instead. Likewise, he displayed great tact in having all the grave offerings removed, instead of being so crude as to post guards at the cemetery.

THINGS went so nicely that Carson relaxed and began to enjoy a breathing-spell. The morale of the crew was good. This encouraged him sufficiently to make him wonder whether, by a crisp course of apple-polishing, back home; he could get himself appointed to the job of administering the trading-post that would certainly be established on the asteroid. Having got things off to a good start, he could keep them right.

The other alternative was to doctor the log of the cruise, so that there would be not one chance in a thousand that any succeeding party would spot the asteroid. The completion of his mission—flight to Jupiter and return—was all he had any obligation to do.

While debating this matter, and realizing more and more that even if he were made trading-post factor, he would eventually have a successor with different ideas on running things, Tweed came bursting into the cabin.

"Skipper, there's hell to pay in town! Drunks going hog-wild; somehow, they got hold of a lot of uncut liquor. I tried to break it up."

Carson eyed the man. He was battered, bleeding, and had one eye shut. "Looks like it halfway broke you up; turn out the guard."

"Guard, hell! Every son and his brother, officers and all, are kicking the gong around."

Carson grabbed his helmet and made for the companionway.

"Grab your guns, you dope!" Tweed said, as he lurched for the locker to get his belt; "you'll need 'em."

As they raced along the path to the settlement, Tweed explained, "They found out that those slugs are gold and platinum—and regardless of color, mostly platinum; they got a lot of notions."

Several crew-members were running from town. They ignored Carson's hail. Tweed caught him by the shoulder when he halted. "Never mind them; let's go."

When they got to the torch lighted town, Carson found the plaza strewn

with ear-pendants, headgear, and slugs of precious metal. Natives, goaded beyond the limit of their good manners, were ganging up on the drunken spacemen. The latter, cornered in an angle of the wall, were making a good defense; both sides were using clubs, rocks, and whatever else they could grab.

Women, stripped to tatters, huddled in doorways. Some were bloodspattered, their earlobes torn by the snatching of their pendants and ear rings.

Brandy-jugs and earthenware pots were smashed. Half the crew was down, punchy from having booted and slugged so many natives; thus far, spears, hatchets, and knives had not come into play.

Breathless, Carson wove on his feet a moment before shouting, "Lay off! Quit this monkey business."

Seeing he was armed, one shouted, "Cut 'em down, skipper!"

He drew his gun, picked a clear stretch of wall and fired. The blast shattered the masonry. Red hot fragments spattered, singeing crewmen and natives alike. The shock, the flash, the crackle of stone disintegrating as from intense heat, checked the infuriated attackers.

"Pick us those drunks and get them out of here while you can!"

Voice and gesture assured the natives that Carson was on their side. They were willing to withdraw: Old Kalgar appeared from a doorway, and singsonged a few words. There was every reason to believe that peace would be restored; groups of natives, coming on the run with weapons, checked their stride instead of closing in. They were responding to Kalgar's command, not to fear of any strange arms; they had not seen the blast.

And then two crew members came into the plaza, yelling.

Their shipmates answered. The newcomers had guns. Carson turned, but too late; there was a crackle and flash and blast. Half a dozen of Kalgar's people crumpled.

Carson's gun flicked into line; he

fired twice. The two crewmen dropped, a smoking, frying huddle. He said to Kalgar, "That is the best I can do. The others will behave." He turned to Garrett. "March them back, mister; you've allowed enough deviltry for one evening."



ONCE THE drunks had left the plaza, Carson picked up the guns dropped by the two he had cut down. He offered them to Kalgar. "They are easy to use; I'll show you how. Keep them in case there is more trouble. Though I think these fellows have learned their lesson."

Tweed interrupted, "Skipper, you'd better not dally here too long."

"Probably not," Carson agreed, as he turned toward Kalgar. "I'll be back to talk to you. Maybe we can still make some arrangement for your people to finish refuelling."

The old man bowed; women ventured from corners and doorways to recover their ornaments. Leaving the village, Carson, spoke his mind to Tweed. "I am the guy who discovered an asteroid all dripping with thorium, platinum, and what have you," he said, bitterly.

"You'll be decorated," Tweed said; "there'll be a trading-post established. The natives will be civilized, and put to work in the mines; there'll be no more loose women lolling around the plaza. It will be a fine new world. It will be such a wow that not much will be said about your gunwork."

Carson eyed him. "You seem to like this place."

"Brother, I do."

"Like it enough to make sure it won't get the processing you mention?"

"Sound off, Wakt."

"Then give me a hand with a bit of sabotage. The *Hyperion* won't be taking off; she'll be reported lost

with all hands. That will prove, back home, that I was a crackpot. Once our hand-guns are knocked out of action, anyone who doesn't have good manners will end up at the business-end of a native hatchet, and the rest of us who behave will be among friends."

"You've got something," Tweed said, thoughtfully. "And the job is easy, if you understand the alloy the shell is made of."

"So *you're* wise to that, too? Then let's have at it."

Mango gin was peculiar stuff. It worked like a bomb with a delayed-action fuse. However hard the initial impact might be, it was relatively mild compared to the payoff blast.

"When they feel anything at all," Carson observed, as he looked over the several who lay in huddles about the boarding port, "they'll wish they were dead. And with everyone out cold, we have time to do our job."

Once in his cabin, after having made the rounds of the *Hyperion*, just to make sure none of the wrong people were conscious, Carson said to Tweed, "I feel nasty about roping you in on this."

Tweed shrugged. "We'll get home-sick. We'll forget the headaches we had back home; we'll remember all the good things. Friends and the like; to say nothing of doctors and dentists. If we live here long enough to get creaky and rusty, it will be tough."

"I've been thinking of all that. Is there any really important girl, back home?"

"Nice, but I can get over it; how about you?"

"A fellow could have done a lot worse. But being a hero's widow won't be a bad break for Flora at all. I like these people. If it hadn't been for my brilliant pigheadedness, they'd been left in peace."

"Uh—listen, Walt—I hate to burn this ship. She's the sweetest job that ever scorched a takeoff platform; there's gear and equipment that could

be unshipped and used. Why not just foul up the instruments so she can't be navigated?"

Carson sighed. "As long as she is here, every native will be on edge; you and I will be on edge. Convincing them that we are here for keeps and none of us can go back to bring a crowd of invaders, to take the place over, would be impossible as long as the ship is here. They can't think in the scientific terms we take for granted."

CARSON and Tweed set to work, drilling holes into bulkheads and hull-plates. The peculiarity of the alloy was that if sufficient high test thorium ore was pulverized, then activated and rammed home, an atomic pile would be formed. The chain-reaction eventually set in motion would be relatively slow; instead of a detonation, there would be a flash like the oxidation of magnesium; a mere explosion, but violent enough.

The only uncertainty was this: how long would it take for the critical point to be reached?

Once there were sufficient hot spots to give the *Hyperion* no chance of survival, Carson said, "Grab the first-aid supplies, and then we'll get these fellows sobered up and moving."

"How'll we get them far enough away?"

"I'll tend to that. You hustle to the village and tell Kalgar to keep everyone four-five miles from the ship. There might be more of a blast than we're counting on. Cook up any kind of a yarn that they'll understand. All that counts is that they've got to stay well away, and that they're convinced I'm going to keep the crew in line."

Once Tweed was on the way, Carson set to work giving the drunks subcutaneous injections to snap them out of it. Reviving, the bemuddled fellows flocked around Carson for the next stage of treatment: beakers of foaming mixture, followed by vitamins.

The final course of shots in the arm brought them up to normal, as far as they could tell. This would carry them along until they had actually straightened out.

"After the hell you fellows raised," he began, "we are getting out of here. We are too badly outnumbered. Even with weapons to clean up the town, we'd finally be swamped—starved out—whittled down. But before we haul out, we are going to make this stop pay off."

There were questions. He had them hooked.

"Starting that riot," he continued, "crabbed the plan I was working on. Beyond the hot springs—" He pointed. "There is a sort of low, stumpy tower. A round about path through the jungle will get us there without being spotted."



"From all I was able to gather by keeping my mouth shut and my ears open, and being sociable, the place is packed with bars of platinum and gold alloys. It's a kind of temple bank. The gods are the stockholders, you might put it. The people borrow there, and pay back seven bars for each five they took out; we are going to float us a loan before we leave."

Carson did not for an instant believe that he had gained their goodwill. On the other hand, the bait had made them side track their personal resentments for the time being. He resumed, after a pause, "Grab your kits and line up; bring extra charges. The tower is solid. It'll take a barrage to disintegrate the wall."

•

They lost no time in turning out with side-arms. Carson led them along

a trail that snake^d into the jungle. It was not hard going.

"Where's Tweed?" someone demanded.

"Squaring things up with Kalgar. Telling him I've got the whole crew under arrest; no liberty till further notice."

Emerging from the forest, they came to a broad stretch of wastelands. This barren space was all of quivering pumice. Steam plumed up through crevasses and blowholes; where the ground was firm, it was even worse, being of black lava, crisscrossed by deep slashes. For each mile gained, there had been a detour of three or four miles.

They were battered, bruised, cut and scratched from floundering among the ridges of volcanic debris. Camp was made early. While Carson's doctoring had forestalled hangovers, there would be a steep let-down. Garrett fagged, though he had appeared sober enough at the time of the riot. Apparently, the tricky liquor had worked true to form, so that while quitting before he had begun to feel the effects, there had nevertheless been a delayed knockout. On the other hand, Garrett and another sober-seeming one, Ames, had been busy rounding up drunks and herding them to the *Hyperion*, while Carson and Tweed planted the seeds of destruction.

All in all, Carson felt that he had things well in hand. Considering that he, himself, was dog-tired, he could count on none of the crew's going on the prowl, looking for trouble.

"Which watch will you take, mister?" he asked Garrett. "It's between you and me; the men will dope off for sure."

"Ames is OK," Garrett said. "Divide it between the three of us."

Carson ended by taking the first watch. He did not expect trouble from the natives. Tweed's message to Kalgar would check any natural impulse toward private revenge. However, standing watch would suggest that there was danger, and help keep the crowd in hand.

IN THE MORNING, Carson learned how dangerously he had failed in sizing up the entire situation. Without warning, and as though at a signal, he was seized from behind. His captors disarmed him before he could begin to defend himself. And then he was facing Garrett's drawn gun.

"I'm taking command; you are under arrest, skipper, for going beyond the bounds of your authority," Garrett announced. "Ames and I checked up, last night, with a couple of our native friends. There is nothing in that tower but images, and small offerings." He grinned. "The crewmen have been making enemies, by and large. But we've not all been that way; that's where you slipped."

"Do you realize that this is mutiny?"

Garrett shook his head. "You had a stowaway, and you let him exercise command, which was illegal; you shot two crewmen. During flight, you *could* have done that, within the Space Articles, if the safety of the ship made it necessary. This happened to be on land. So you are going to face trial for misconduct, and murder. We can make it stick, and we *will* make it stick, regardless of your in-laws.

"You have teamed up with Kalgar, against your own men. You could have led this outfit into an ambush. Then, with most of the eye witnesses to the shooting disposed of, there'd have been a faked heroic withdrawal, and flight for home."

"That story won't stick," Carson objected.

"The hell it won't; you're outnumbered. Don't count on Tweed. We took care of him, last night. There is a shortcut to town. You didn't fool me, marching us around in circles."

"You've gone a long way to settle a grudge, mister. Even as far as disposing of a witness favorable to me."

"Tweed was plotting with the natives to ambush the whole party," Garrett retorted. "Once he was knocked out of action, the natives changed

their tune. All right, get going; we're taking off. We don't need to wait for any more fuel. There's enough in the bunkers to get us to Mars."



LOCKED UP in a compartment of the *Hyperion*, Carson saw no way of breaking Garrett's luck.

As far as Carson, himself, was concerned, he could gain nothing by telling Garrett that the ship would disintegrate in flight—or perhaps before she took off. To disassemble the atomic boosters would accomplish nothing but setting him back to Terra, to face trial. It was clear that he'd no chance of acquittal. Whether he blinked out in mid-space or faced a firing squad, was pretty much of a toss up. In refusing to warn Garrett, he was giving the natives a break; it was actually costing him nothing except the strain of waiting for the blast of annihilation.

If ever again there came an expedition of "gods", the natives would know how to deal with them—provided that the strangers were not too numerous to be ambushed without parley.

Recalling ancient history, what had befallen the Aztecs and the Incas, some eleven centuries previous, Carson wondered why barbarians were always so befuddled by superstition as to reject the clear chance of insuring their own safety.

Meanwhile, atoms were having their electrons knocked off; destruction gathered. Carson settled down to the problem of saving his own hide, if he could, and including the crew in his strategy. Mutiny or no, this was an obligation which he could not evade.

Fagged out from their binge and

their long march, they had decided against taking off at once; they needed clear heads for crossing the dangerous asteroid-belt.

It was difficult for Carson to keep from fingering the deck and bulkheads, to see if the temperature was rising; it was impossible to keep from breaking into a sweat as he undertook to race an unknown competitor whose start—however sluggish—accelerated in geometrical ratio.

When it finally came to him, Carson could only wonder why it had taken so long for him to discard all the impossible devices which had made him waste so much time.

A few words via intercom brought two crewmen to herd him to Garrett's quarters. It was nearly daybreak; take-off hour could not be far ahead. Carson said to Garrett, "Don't let a personal grudge make a chump of you, mister. Going back with your report will be glory enough, without trotting me along; going back with a cargo of treasure will redouble it. And I'll tell you how it can be done."

"You played us for suckers once," Garrett countered.

"Kalgar and I got along like brothers," Carson explained. "I rate with the natives, and with him—and, plenty. Man to man, that gunwork of mine is the best thing I ever did for you."

Garrett began to catch on. "You mean they'd pay off if I turned you loose?"

"Sure, they would; just enter into the log that I escaped."

Garrett shook his head. "There will be another expedition. And there would be a leak, sooner or later. That'd make it awkward for me."

"If you can't figure further than that," Carson said, contemptuously, "you can't navigate your way back home. Are you sure you're not taking me along—instead of having me 'shot while resisting arrest'—just to show you the way back, when the going gets sticky?"

"Well, let's hear your notion!"

"Simply report me escaped. You can always make good, on your return, by getting some native into a nasty spot, so he'll have to turn me in—to save his own hide. Meanwhile, I will be getting a break; the longer I can stay out of court, the better for me."

"That begins to make sense. How much will Kalgar dig up?"

"Turn out the whole crew and keep your eyes open. By daylight, and in open country, there's no risk of being ambushed or bottled up in a spot where guns don't help. It stands to reason that there must be a lot of ingots hoarded up. And, well out of sight—or else those hoodlums would not have bothered looting graveyards and snatching women's trinkets. Kalgar will dig and keep digging until you tell him to quit; that is, until every compartment is loaded to the limit."

"We can't lose," Garrett admitted, after having studied the obvious so carefully that he convinced himself that there could not be any trick. "It's a cinch to win."

He was right. He had just decided to save himself and his crew.

HANDS LASHED in front of him, Carson led his escort. He was in front so that upon sighting any natives, he could parley before they took to their heels at the sight of the armed party.

The bulkheads had been getting warmer. Carson, out of the death-trap, developed a new and cruel uneasiness. To be caught by the blast, now, would be infinitely worse than before he had talked himself out of his prison.

"What the hell's the hurry?" Garrett gasped. "Going to a fire?"

"If you were in my place," Carson answered, slackening his pace, "you'd be impatient. I spent a tough night."

The time it would take to amass sufficient loot to satisfy the crew



Mars had become a fellaheen civilization, now...

would be enough. There would be no need even of maneuvering for a chance to tell Kalgar to stall as much as possible.

Ahead were hot springs. Gusts of warm vapor blanketed the broken ground. From high-spots, Carson could look over the low-lying steam, and see the town, now ruddy in the early light. On a distant hummock, he spotted several natives; they were carrying baskets, probably, loaded with garden truck.

"See them?" Carson exclaimed. "Gone, now!"

A few moments later, Garrett spied a farmer, and then a second. The first carried something which twinkled in the dawn. It might have been an axe. Despite the advantage of carrying

explosive weapons, the crew became alert; they craned their necks. The only sounds were the hiss and gurgle and bubbling of springs, and the crunch of feet, and the rattle of dislodged rocks.

Carson tripped. Hands bound, he took a header, rolled down a rough slope, banging up against a ledge. Someone chortled. Another cursed, and from alarm, rather than because of a stubbed toe.

There was a thump, and the familiar blast of a power projector.

Carson's first thought was that someone behind him, tripping, had accidentally triggered his weapon.

Another blast; a chunk of rock, still shooting sparks, rattled down to crash against Carson. It took him a moment to realize that the blasts had not been aimed at him; they were wild shots. The crew were now cutting

loose, right and left. From steam veiled crevasses came answering fire.

Answering fire—not echoes. That was what numbed Carson's mind as effectively as had the dislodged rock paralyzed his body. A crew man, shot to smoking tatters, slid downgrade. Primitive missiles hissed and smacked. Firing crazily into the treacherous mists, Carson's captors broke in panic; their superior weapons were of no avail against assailants they could not see. Meanwhile, they were being peppered with power guns, right flank and left.

The only way Carson could explain the shooting from both sides of the party was that some of Garrett's crew, stumbling around in the mist, had gone trigger-happy at the sight of hostile natives, and were firing at their own comrades by mistake.

AS HE STRUGGLED with his bonds, trying to burn them against the glowing rim of the blasted rock, the voices receded. Carson wondered, as he seared and scorched himself, what he could do when he was free. From the hips down, he was still helpless.

Once the mistake was discovered, his chance would be gone.

The bonds yielded. Palms to the ground, he hoisted himself and tried to get his legs beneath him; he could not.

Then from the swirling steam came several natives. Seeing him, they yelled with glee, picked him up to hustle him along mist-veiled ways. Soon there were no sounds of combat or of flight. Bit by bit, the answer came to Carson. The night of the riot, he had given Kalgar the guns dropped by the two drunks who had fired on the crowd.

Presently, he made his rescuers set him on his feet and hold him upright. One leg had come to life; that one was not enough. They had to carry him further.

His friends finally halted to rest. The mists were thinning. Carson saw three men approaching. One had a gun; so did the two natives who were

with him. Tweed, all bandaged, hobbled along, covering the ground in awkward bounds.

"I heard—they told me—Garrett did, I mean," Carson fumbled, "that they'd settled you for keeps."

"Damn near did, but Kalgar's boys patched me up. Anyway, when I came out of it enough to understand what had happened to you—what must have happened—we set out for the ship. None of the natives had the least notion that she was hot, or would stay that way until you were back aboard. I was afraid you'd been knocked cold before you could get in a word, to warn Garrett."

"She still is hot."

"What?"

"Sure." He told his story, and concluded, "Meanwhile, you figured you might wangle your way aboard and pull a surprise attack?"

ONE OF the natives shouted, and gestured.

Flame enveloped the landing struts of the *Hyperion*. She rose on her column of exhaust blast, dazzling white even in full day. It spread out over the ground until, accelerating, she made a long silvery streak against the sky.

Carson watched. The improvised pile might fail; it might be discovered in time, and taken down. His mind became a jarring confusion from the contradictions which wracked it. He hoped that the mutineers would act in time—and he hoped that the blast would make sure that there would never again be an expedition beyond Mars. The clash became unendurable. He tried to turn away from watching the diminishing speck of silver; he wished that he could black out, but he did not.

Then, when the *Hyperion* was beyond the reach of the keenest eye, there was a blinding blue-white blot that made the sky black in comparison. The *Hyperion* had turned to vapor. The blotch of incandescence persisted. It held its form, instead of spreading beyond its original reach.

Presently, it seemed to contract. Whether this was an actual pulling-together, or whether the persistence of outward velocity made it appear to diminish in size, Carson could not tell.

It was moving in the direction of the sun's motion. The disintegration of the *Hyperion* had taken place before she had passed the limit of the asteroid's gravitation, though well beyond the stratosphere.

"You'd think it'd cool off," Tweed muttered. "In absolute zero."

Carson shrugged. "Radioactive. Or the vapor is ionized, and will glow no matter how cold. The answers make no difference any more. We'll be forgetting everything we ever learned as atomic quizz-kids."

"How long will it last?" Tweed persisted.

"Wait and see; we have lots of time, Alec. Meanwhile, here is an asteroid with at least a temporary artificial satellite."

"And two new citizens."

They eyed each other, and studied the satellite for another moment.

"Alani," Carson said, "wrote me off, that night. I wish I'd had sense enough to have had her stow away and make the cruise with us. What she told me about the Martian ideas on life and living set me thinking, and had something to do with the way I got a snootful when I saw what'd finally happen to this place."

Tweed clapped him on the shoulder. "There's a gal I'd like to have you meet. One thing, anyway; I'm not going to be homesick. And neither are you, for very long. Tonight, you'll be sitting in a dark corner, looking for Mars. Then there'll be tomorrow, and the day after."

Carson turned and rejoined the natives. They would be interested to know that the incandescent blot in the sky was their assurance that there would ever again be colonists to foul up the asteroid.

★



Headliners In Our July Issue

BECAUSE OF THE STARS

by Charles Dye

THEY SHALL RISE

Novelet of the Great Legend

by Wallace West

UNREASONABLE FACSIMILE

by Lester del Rey

*these, and many others, appear
in the current*

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

Cover by A. Leslie Ross

WILD TALENTS, INC.

by Milton Lesser

**Amos Terwilliger had a wild talent: he could teleport.
But he didn't want to spend his entire existence doing
nothing but teleporting?**

THE OFFICE was on the fourteenth level, and Terwilliger winked at the secretary. She did not wink back; Terwilliger was short and thin, with nondescript sandy hair and nondescript features—unless you considered the big Adam's apple, which was not properly part of his face.

The secretary asked him, "Whom do you wish to see?"

"Mr. Cuff," Terwilliger told her; "I want to see Mr. Cuff."

She looked bored, in a polite way. "Everyone does," she said. "Is it some help you want?"

Terwilliger looked beyond her, to the gilt sign over the archway. It read:

YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE?
BRING THE MONEY AND
WE'LL DO IT.

He shook his head. "No. I didn't come in answer to your ad—"

"Then let me guess: You have a wild talent."

Terwilliger brightened. "That's it; that's it exactly."

The girl yawned behind a manicured hand. "Let me see—" She took out a long form and wet a pencil. "Name?"

The girl at the next desk looked up. "Amos Terwilliger," she said.

Terwilliger turned to face her, but the girl was reading her book again. He could see the title on the lurid dust jacket: *The Passionate Martian*. A best-seller, strictly lending library calliber.

"Miss, how did you know my name?"

The first girl smiled. "Oh, that? She makes a practise of it. She can read minds; that's what she's here for."

Terwilliger felt oddly frightened. He had known what to expect here at the Corporation, but only in a fuzzy way. The place was the rage of the three worlds and the asteroid belt, also in a fuzzy way. Everyone knew something about *Wild Talents, Inc.*, but when you got right down to it, no one could tell you precisely what he knew. It was all too fuzzy. Terwilliger's introduction was a girl who read lurid best-sellers and minds.

"Well," Terwilliger said, "this is a waste of time. I didn't come here for you to fill out a form; I came to see Mr. Cuff."

The girl wet her pencil between her lips again. "Everyone comes to see Mr. Cuff, but everyone fills this form out. Then you see Mr. Saunders, our lie-detector. After that, Sue here reads your mind as a double-check. Then there's Hawson of genetics; Farley of psych; Morley, the emotional evaluator, placement, scheduling... In the course of four or five years, you might see Mr. Cuff. I'm his receptionist, and I saw him once."

Terwilliger shook his head. "Can't spare the time. I have a wild talent, and I want it developed. The Corporation helps me develop it, then I work for you ten years: That's the deal, isn't it?"

She nodded. "Provided, of course,

Saunders, Sue Hawson, Farley, Morley and about a dozen others think you're suited. You'd be surprised how many phoney wild talents there are. Now then, how old are you, Mr. Terwilliger?"

"Twenty-six, Terwilliger told her. "But that's all."

"What do you mean, that's all?"

"I mean the rest of what I say is told to Mr. Cuff, not his receptionist; no Saunders, Farley, Morley, anyone else..."

HE WALKED past the desk angrily. A hand reached out and landed on his shoulder, spinning him around; it was the manicured hand of the receptionist. The hand slid under his armpit, and the girl placed her other hand under his other armpit. Then she lifted him up and sat him on the desk—all as if Terwilliger had been a baby, still in his swaddling clothes.

The girl at the next desk looked up from her best-seller and giggled. Terwilliger felt foolish; he was small, but he prided himself on not being a weakling. The receptionist, for all her pretty young curves, had tossed him around effortlessly.

Both her hands were on his shoulders again, and Terwilliger could not move. "That's what I'm here for," she said. "Mr. Cuff has his share of cranks who want to see him, and some of them might be violent. They'd be wary of a bodyguard, but not of me. I showed promise along these lines. I was unusually strong for my size and sex. The Corporation trained me on Jupiter, with Jupiter's gravity." She smiled. "I guess I'm as strong as anyone in the system now."

With one hand she held Terwilliger, and with the other, she picked up her pencil. "Now then—"

Terwilliger grinned. "So that's your wild talent, eh?"

"Uh-huh."

"It's not so wild; it's not so wild—" Terwilliger's brow creased deeply. "Here," he said, "let me show you something."



The vase soared off the desk and poised over the girl's head...

The best seller jumped out of the other girl's hands and alighted with a not-too-gentle bump on the receptionist's head. Then *The Passionate Martian* thudded to the floor. The receptionist jumped away from him, cringing.

Terwilliger leaped numbly off the desk and strode under the archway toward Cuff's private office. He called back over his shoulder, "I have a wild talent, too. I teleport."

CHRISTOPHER CUFF sat at a huge desk of polished obsidian. The desk took up half the office, sprawling over the thick green carpet like a black Venusian slug, but it looked puny. Christopher Cuff was a massive man, too tremendous to be real. He must have been close to seven feet tall, and if his shoulders were three feet across under the bright glow of a priceless Martian fabric, the waist was four.

He snapped something into his viziphone, then cut the connection. As he turned to face Terwilliger, his jowls wagged back and forth with the effort. It took several moments for the motion to subside.

"Now then, young man?" Cuff's voice rumbled up from the vicinity of his navel.

Terwilliger, quite suddenly, was afraid. Christopher Cuff was a legend in the twenty-first century solar system; Terwilliger never heard of anyone who had seen him.

"I teleport," Terwilliger said feebly.

"You—ah... What section? I don't remember any teleporters in our employ. Of course, we have so many. What section, what section?"

"No section, sir. Not yet. I teleport and I thought—"

Cuff chuckled. "Well, I'll be damned. I'll be double-damned and sent to the hot side of Mercury in my underwear. You're new; you're applying."

Terwilliger cleared his throat. "Yes, sir."

"I *will* be damned. By the system,

boy, how the hell did you ever get past that Jovian-trained amazon?" Cuff began to chuckle at some private joke, and soon he was laughing so hard that Terwilliger thought he had been forgotten.

"Mr. Cuff? Mr. Cuff? I teleport..."

Cuff was still laughing and the tears streamed down his great jowls. "I don't care if you move galaxies; you got past that amazon—"

Terwilliger smiled.

Cuff cleared his throat with a miniature peal of thunder. "You just couldn't appreciate it, my boy; she was Jovian-trained under two-and-a-half g's—"

Terwilliger saw this as a chance to blow his own horn. "It's easy if you're talented. How can brawn, mere physical prowess, hope to hold its own against a legitimate wild talent?"

CUFF GOT serious. This was his fetish. "Oh it can. It's according to the talent. We have someone here on the asteroid whose talent lies in being a philosopher. I've made him the best damned metaphysician in the universe; he can cogitate with the best brains that ever lived, but Miss Jovian Muscles out there could tear him apart with her toenails."

Cuff lit a big cigar and puffed contentedly. "That, in short, is the purpose of the Corporation. It's the way to perfection for the whole—specialization in the parts. Everyone here knows more and more about less and less, or can do more and more with less and less—the result is an organization which can accomplish anything. Anything, my boy. Anything. Ah... What did you say your special talent was?"

"It's how I got past the receptionist," Terwilliger told him, trying not to be upset by the thick cigar smoke.

"I don't believe it; I don't believe a damn word of it."

"You misunderstand. I didn't mean that—"

"No one is stronger than that Jo-

The late Charles Fort was one of those people who spend their careers in exposing various kinds of nonsense, and perpetuating their own brands of nonsense at the same time. One observation of Fort's, however, seems to be reasonable enough, from observed evidence — namely, that there has existed, and probably still exists, scatterations of human beings endowed with "wild talents". The "wild talent" is an ability which seemingly violates one or more of the natural restrictions upon humans, and its existence is often seized upon by mystics and charlatans to "prove" all manner of supernatural hokum. Scientifically, we do not know very much about the "wild talent"; however, anything that exists in so tangible a form can be used by the imaginative entrepreneur, such as Christopher Cuff . . . RWL

vian dame, you hear? I spent a million dollars making her the strongest damn person in the system; so, you lie!"

"I'm not stronger," said Terwilliger. "I teleport. Teleport. T-e-l-e-p-o-r-t. I surprised her with a little trick of teleportation. It's easy if you know how—"

The cigar gave off smoke furiously. "Teleportation, eh? Show me, my boy—"

"Name's Terwilliger," Terwilliger said. "Amos."

"Well, Amos, you just show me. Teleportation. . ."

The cigar leaped from Cuff's fat lips. It hovered in the air a moment, and Cuff's beady eyes bulged wide. Terwilliger began to sweat as the cigar dipped toward a big bronze ashtray. It came to rest there, and Terwilliger slumped back in a chair.

"Damn!" Cuff exploded. Then he flicked a switch, barking into the intercom: "Jane? Send in the employment record."

In a moment, the door opened, and a thin bald-headed man stepped into the office. "Yes, Mr. Cuff?"

"Employment?"

"Yes, sir. Name is Wilson. You sent for me?"

"Yes. I want the file on parapsychology." Then Cuff turned to Terwilliger. "We keep no records here; this man has a perfect memory. We

have another business file and a stand-in for each. Much simpler than keeping records. Specialization," he explained.

Wilson's voice droned monotonously. "Parapsychology. Arden, psychokinesis. Abbott, telepathy. Abington, telepathy. Affington, clairvoyance. . ."

The voice droned on.

"Stop. Stop!" Cuff roared. "Be more explicit. What I want to know is this: have we any teleportation people?"

Wilson hummed softly to himself. then, after a while, he shook his head. "No. No, sir. There's not a single one on the list. Never was. And, I might say, never will be—"

"Shut up!" Cuff told him. "You're here as a damn file, not to prognosticate; we have a prognostication department. . ."

"I know," Wilson admitted. "Baker, Barker, Cummings, Dorsay, Mullin, Semple, Timmins—"

"Get out," Cuff told him.

AFTER THE man was gone, Cuff shook his head. "That's the trouble. Even an organization like this one cannot be perfect. Close, Amos. Damn, damn close—but not perfect. Here we have a record staffer who wants to prognosticate. If he had talents along those lines, I'd have put him in prognostication. It

works like a charm, Amos; just as the last century was the century of the common man, so this is the century of the uncommon man. Specialists. Some with wild talents, like yours. Others who are just plain specialists, like my cook. The best cook in the solar system. He was good to begin with, and I spent five years and half a million dollars training him; now he's the best. You can bathe me in Jupiter's liquid methane if he's not the best."

Terwilliger nodded. "I had heard about the Corporation. Now I'd like to know where I fit in."

"Teleportation. It wasn't a trick, was it, Amos?" Abruptly, Cuff seemed alarmed.

Terwilliger concentrated. Slowly, very slowly, the door opened—and in sailed the best seller, *The Passionate Martian*. Behind it came the girl Sue. "I knew you were going to do that, Mr. Terwilliger I read your mind, but I could not stop it. The book just—jumped out of my hands."

"And what," Cuff demanded coldly, "do you think you're doing, reading *The Passionate Martian*?"

"Well—Please, Mr. Cuff. I can see that you are going to fire me. I won't—"

"I pay you to read minds, not trashy sub-literature. You're a specialists with a wild talent. But there are half a hundred others in the mind-reading school, with that talent. Don't tax me; don't tax my damn patience—"

"I know you are thinking to fire me. After graduation the mind-reading school sends a dozen eligibles up this way."

"Well, get back to your desk and stop reading my mind—"

"That's what you pay me for, you said; so I read minds."

Cuff began to turn purple, but the girl was gone. *The Passionate Martian* rested on Cuff's big obsidian desk.

"That," Cuff explained, "is another

example of what a trying business this can be."

Terwilliger said nothing. Cuff was the richest man in the system.

TERWILLIGER had a thought, an unpleasant thought. "I hope I don't have to go to school for teleportation."

Cuff shook his head. "Hell, no. In the first place, we don't have such a school. No people who can teleport, no school. You're the first one, Amos; the very first. If we get any further candidates, which seems unlikely, you'd be their teacher. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile, you will be head of our fast freight department. I can see it now... For years we've tried to get a foothold in that business, but there's a veritable monopoly. It doesn't take a wild talent; it doesn't take specialization—just a lot of unspecialized manpower. It was always something below us—below the era of the uncommon man, below the dignity of the Corporation. Now—now, Amos, your it. You're Cuff Fast Freight. Better still, you're Cuff Instantaneous Freight. Uh, it is instantaneous, isn't it?"

"When I want it to be," Terwilliger assured him. "But there's only one trouble; I can't move heavy objects. Oh, I can, within limits, but it's a strain. An object is not moved without a considerable output of energy. That's a law of physics, and I've found it applies to teleportation. I use mental energy; I could only work a couple of hours per earth day, and I could not move objects that weigh more than a hundred pounds, or the strain would be too great. As for distance, there is no limit. Teleportation, like any other parapsychological talent, does not diminish with distance; the sky is the limit, literally. But of course, you know that, Mr. Cuff."

"Naturally. And, as for your limitations, Amos, my boy, you're wrong. There's where specialization comes in again. You do *nothing* but teleport. Everything else is done for you. You

won't become tired; your weight maximum will probably skyrocket to two-hundred pounds, later, to three. You'll be able to put in a full five hour day..."

"But I do nothing else? Absolutely nothing—?"

"Absolutely," said Cuff.

"I'd get bored."

Cuff smiled. "Would you get bored at, say, a million dollars a year?"

Terwilliger wanted to talk, but he had almost swallowed his tongue.

"How much...did you say?"

"I thought so," Cuff laughed. "A million it is, and you start today. There's an empty office on the hundred thirteenth level; you'll find your name on the door when you get there. I'll send the ads out to the televue companies at once, and business should start pouring in, Amos. You'll get your five hours in today, and five tomorrow, and the next day. Sunday's off, of course, but I don't want you to do anything strenuous. You can sit on the sundeck, or—well, you'll see, Amos. You're not alone."

TERWILLIGER saw in the weeks which followed. Actually, he did not see much. For five hours each day he was Cuff Instantaneous Freight. He had a big televue screen in his office, and his customers presented themselves to him in that way. He received the money by teleportation, then he saw what had to be moved. He concentrated, and a valuable piece of jewelry disappeared from its vault in Kansas City, on Earth. Terwilliger was in his office on Ceres, but it did not matter: The jewelry left Earth, vanished utterly and instantly, and Terwilliger teleported it to its destination in Canal City, on Mars. Time, three seconds for Terwilliger. Fee, a thousand dollars.

They never moved anything which was not rush-rush, and if the customer was that much in a hurry, he'd pay their fee. He knew it in advance, or he would not have brought his business to Cuff Instantaneous Freight.

And so it went. Terwilliger earned his money: Cuff Instantaneous Freight achieved a quick monopoly on rush-orders. The fastest space-ships lagged incredibly far behind; they just could not compete.

But Terwilliger was bored. His spare time—19 hours per earth day—was his own, and yet not his own. He was restricted; he could do nothing which would tire him. That would mean a decrease in his productive powers. He could lie on the sundeck where the magnifiers reproduced a Venusian beach stripped of the blanketing clouds. Or he could sit in his soft chair and watch spaceships come in from Venus, Earth, Mars, and the Jovian Moons. But nothing else.

He could not even walk to the sun-deck; a mechanical chair took him.

He knew the Corporation was vast—it had a monopoly on virtually every wild talent and specialized ability in the system, but he could not even see it functioning. Other recreations were for other workers, decided upon in advance by Cuff and Terwilliger hardly ever saw them. He had not seen Cuff since the day he started to work.

He'd teleport some jewelry, some China for a special occasion, a piece of delicate machinery which was needed in a hurry on Ganymede, a treaty which had to get back to earth from Iapetus for instantaneous ratification by the Senate, a g-string of a special Calitin cloth for a high-paid stripper on Venus, a dozen other items. Every day. Five hours a day, six days a week. The rest of the time was his own, but he had nothing to do. He'd try to do something, and he'd be halted. Mind reading, it seemed, was a cheap wild talent, and Cuff's mind readers were everywhere, reventing any unauthorized activity.

Once Terwilliger had made a date with the Jovian-muscled receptionist. She was cute and she was pretty, yet because she was stronger than half a dozen men she was not Terwilliger's

idea of the ideal date. He picked her up on the fourteenth level and she looked invitingly feminine, but a mind-reader stopped them on their way to the amusement level (reserved strictly for the menials, ordinary workers in this extraordinary Corporation) and Terwilliger was sent to the sundeck. The girl shrugged and walked off daintily, femininely—to instruct a class in boxing for those who had special talents in physical strength.

Terwilliger soon slept fifteen hours a day. He had nothing else to do, and that gave him enough time to move freight and eat.

How could he complain? He thought of that often. His wild talent had been latent within him as a child, and it had developed slowly over the years. He worked in a touring side-show, astounding people with his feats, and he made five-thousand a year. Now he was earning two-hundred times that, so how could he complain?

The thought struck him in the fifth week. He may have been earning a million a year, but it was useless; he could not do a thing with it. And the contract read that he was to work with Cuff for ten years, or he did not get a cent. In ten years he would be thirty-six, certainly not old—but somewhat past the prime of life. From ten years of inactivity he would be weak and out of condition. He'd have soft and flabby muscles; he'd be old before his time. He'd be thirty-six, but an old man—he'd have earned ten million dollars but he would not be able to spend it the way he wanted.

It wasn't worth it. He'd try to rectify the situation. Amos wanted activity, amusement. There was a lot his money could buy if he were free to come and go as he pleased. He'd try to change Cuff's way of doing things, and if he could not, Cuff and Instantaneous Freight could go to hell.

And ten million dollars. Terwilliger had made up his mind, but he was sad.

THE RECEPTIONIST looked up.

"Amos Terwilliger isn't it?"

Terwilliger nodded. "I want to see Mr. Cuff."

She smiled. "Do we have to go through all this again?"

"Well, I work here, and now I want to see him."

"You can't: I told you no one can see Mr. Cuff."

"I saw him last time."

"That was an exception, Amos, and I can tell you that it won't happen again."

"Mr. Cuff's orders?"

"Mr. Cuff never gives me specific orders—only general orders. You can't see him. What's it about?"

"I'm bored," Terwilliger told her.

"Bored? Bored? Ah, yes. I used to be bored. Not any more. Psychology department. Conditioning. I'm perfectly content now. Why don't you try it? Painless, quick—and then you're never bored again. Conditioning, wonderful stuff. I can get you an appointment."

Terwilliger hadn't thought of that. Psychological conditioning: Cuff thought of everything. But Terwilliger shook his head. "I don't want it. No, thanks. That may explain why most of these people seem content, but I don't want to be content in that way. No, thanks."

"Okay. Okay, it's up to you; but I'd advise you to take it."

"No, thanks."

"Well, then, I guess I'll see you some time, Amos. How's Instantaneous Freight, it is Instantaneous freight, isn't it?"

Terwilliger nodded. "You'll see me on the way out," he said; "I'm going in to see Mr. Cuff."

She shook her head. "I don't want to hurt you, Amos, but that's what I'm here for. A fraud wanted to see Mr. Cuff yesterday, and I had to break his collarbone. Amos—"

He walked past the desk and she got up fast. The desk slid along the floor as Terwilliger concentrated on it. She jumped over it nimbly and stood beside him, hands on hips.

He wished his teleportation ability could work on organic material, but it did not. He swallowed. "I don't want to hurt you," he said.

"You don't want to hurt *me*?"

Terwilliger's head bobbed up and down. "That's right; you're a girl and I don't want to hurt you."

She advanced and placed a hand on his shoulder. From the desk, a vase of flowers soared in their direction. It stood poised over the girl's head, and, intent upon Terwilliger, she did not see it. Now he waited for her to move out of his way, and he asked her again, politely but she only laughed. "Sorry," Terwilliger mumbled.

The vase crashed down and broke into a hundred pieces, scattering flowers and water all over the room. The girl slumped against the desk and then slid to the floor.

"Now for Mr. Cuff," said Terwilliger.

CUFF LOOKED up from his desk, surprised. Three men got up and politely left the room, taking big wads of money with them. "Terwilliger?" Cuff demanded. "That is your name, isn't it?"

Cuff was as incredibly fat as ever, and the foul-smelling cigars still clung between his lips. "This is irregular, Terwilliger. Ah, Amos, isn't it?... But once again I see you've gotten past our amazon."

Terwilliger snapped his fingers. "Nothing to it. Mr. Cuff, I'm bored."

"Bored? Try psychological conditioning. Wonderful stuff."

"How do you know? Have you tried it?"

"Oh, no. Damn it, no; why the hell should I? I'm never bored. I'm not an uncommon man, like you, Amos. You have a wild talent, and that's your specialty. You employ it—for a million a year, if I remember. Damn it, boy, a million a year: you'll be rich."

"And too tired to spend my money after ten years. But why aren't you bored, Mr. Cuff?"

"Me? Why should I be? I'm not

restricted, like the rest of you. I can do anything. A common man with a damn uncommon idea, and I can do what I please. I have no special talent to conserve. Take those men who were just in here—they're gamblers, the best in the system, studied and trained for it. They're really satisfying. I lose a few thousand to them each day, but so what. That's what they're here for... But you, Amos. As for you, you'll either take conditioning or stay bored. Up to you, boy."

Terwilliger shook his head. "You want me to stay here?"

"Of course. We have a monopoly on Instantaneous Freight, thanks to you. Do I want you to stay here? What a stupid question."

Cuff was silent for a few seconds, but then he slammed his beefy hand down on the obsidian desk. "Nuts," he barked. "I'll have you conditioned whether you think you want it or not. The best thing for you, Amos. The damn best, boy. You'll see. You'll thank me..."

He pressed a button and barked into the intercom, "Jane!"

No answer.

"Damn that girl—"

"She's unconscious, I think." Terwilliger told him about the vase.

"Bah! She'd only be out a few seconds. Jane! I *will* be damned. This machine is dead."

Cuff's chair swivelled, and his fingers played with the dial of the television. The screen was dead, and no sound came from the audio-box. "That's dead, too!"

"Sure," a voice said.

THREE MEN stood in the doorway with the receptionist. Each one held a levelled blaster, and, with the receptionist, they came inside and closed the door. The first man said again, "Sure, we got a damper in our ship, and none of this stuff'll work."

Cuff's face was white. "Well, what do you want?"

"You won't be hurt. Just open your

safe, that's all. Just open it and let us reach inside..."

Cuff snorted. "You're crazy. I have twenty million dollars in—"

Terwilliger knew Cuff should not have said it, but the man wasn't used to this sort of thing. His world was a perfectly functioning world of unusual puppets, of uncommon men, with a very common man holding the strings. He had never seen the possibility of scientific theft. Now the damper made outside communication impossible, and no one else knew what was going on. They had landed in the ship here on the fourteenth level, and the mind-reading girl in the outer office probably was on the sundeck now. There was Cuff, the receptionist, and Terwilliger—against three armed thieves.

The girl—the girl could use her strength: they'd never expect it from that source! Even as Terwilliger thought of it, the receptionist must have stirred from her lethargy. She still seemed a bit groggy from the vase, but she acted.

Terwilliger had never seen anything like it. He had seen his share of spaceman brawls, and they were something to watch—but this...

The girl simply struck out with both fists at once, hard. Simultaneous motion, so fast that Terwilliger hardly could follow it. As if they had been pole-axed, two of the gunmen fell to the floor.

The third, the leader, stepped back quickly, holding up his blaster. "Pluto!" he said. "A dame..."

"You're damn right a dame," Cuff said proudly. "A special talent, cultivated by the Corporation—"

"Yeah. Yeah, I heard about your special talents, bud. But that's enough; if she moves a muscle, I'll blast her—dame or no."

The receptionist stood very still, as motionless as the two men on the floor.

But the gunman was wary. He turned to Terwilliger. "Just what do you do, friend?"

Terwilliger said nothing, and Cuff,

frightened but still proud, declared: "He teleports."

"Now, what in the hell is that?"

The man did not know the meaning of the word. Terwilliger was lucky. He concentrated, and a book soared off the desk, struck the gunman's shoulder. *Hell*, Terwilliger thought, *I was a few inches off that time.*

The gunman staggered back, and the receptionist seemed ready to jump at him, but he waved the blaster. "I'm still in charge," he said. "But what the hell—"

The book came at him again, the pages flapping in air, and he ducked. It caught the crown of his head, and he staggered again, looking about him wildly.

Then he said, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Teleport. I read about that in the papers...he moves things. So this is the guy. Well, okay: now I know. Girlie?"

The receptionist nodded.

"You move so much as your pinky, and I'll blast you. Izzat clear?"

"It's clear."

"And you—" he turned again to Terwilliger. "If something moves—if *anything* moves that shouldn't—you'll be dead. Remember that. I'll be watching; if something moves, you'll be deader than the cities on northern Mars. You got that?"

Terwilliger said that he got it.

"Now then, my fat friend—" the gun prodded Cuff's huge belly. "You open that safe."

CUFF OPENED the safe, trembling.

The gunman watched the girl, and she didn't move. And Terwilliger stood very still. He'd not teleport now. The man knew he was the agent—and if anything stirred, Terwilliger would be dead. He may have been bored before, but he wasn't that bored; he did not want to be dead.

The gunman took out stack upon stack of money. He put it all in a big sack and then he began to move toward the door. Twenty million dollars... Cuff looked like he was

sweating off a pound a second.

The gunman backed toward the door, ignoring his two unconscious companions. He watched the girl as he retreated, and he glanced about furtively for any unwarranted movement on the part of inanimate objects. *But he did not look at Terwilliger.*

Terwilliger was only dangerous as an agent for teleportation. He was a specialized freak. All the gunman had to do was watch the girl and the room in general—

Terwilliger dove at him and the blaster went off. Then they were down on the floor, struggling, and the blaster skidded across the room. Terwilliger could have used his powers of teleportation now, but he did not want to; he had something to prove.

They rolled over; first Terwilliger was on top, then the gunman; the receptionist stood by, but everytime she wanted to end the fight herself, Terwilliger was in the way.

Finally, he sat on the gunman's chest, and he began to hit the man's face. Left and right, back and forth the head swung under Terwilliger's

fists. Finally, the gunman lay still, and Terwilliger got up, smiling...

TERWILLIGER has two jobs now. He's in charge of Instantaneous Freight, but he's also director of social activities on Ceres. After that incident, it did not take much to prove to Cuff that Terwilliger was right. Wild talents had their place, but alone, they could be harmful. You know more and more about less and less, and you can be pretty helpless at times. Terwilliger, the teleportation man, used brawn when he could not teleport—and the strongest human in the system stood by helplessly, watching.

Terwilliger works two hours a day on Instantaneous Freight, and after that, he's the czar of an entertainment empire. Thousands of people come to Ceres for amusement every month, and that even became profitable to Cuff. He's thinking of switching Terwilliger over completely to amusement. But Terwilliger will refuse.

Take it from me, he'll refuse. I'm Terwilliger.

Looking Ahead

Our September issue of
FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION
features

THE GODS FEAR LOVE

by Gene Hunter

FINAL BARRIER

by Alan E. Nourse

WE WILL INHERIT ...

by Wallace West

Look for this issue on your
newsstands, July 1st





Readin' and Writhin'

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

IF YOU can picture a society wherein children are not born, but appear suddenly, under mysterious circumstances, you may be ready to wrestle with the initial problem Raymond F. Jones sets up in his novel, "Renaissance". (Gnome Press, \$2.75). This is the situation in the little world of Kronweld; and the familiar question, "whence came I?" is as challenging here as it is to youngsters in our own world. Except that, in Kronweld, people live out their lives and die, still knowing nothing of their origin; the mystery is stratified by religious superstition, and while the "Seekers" are free to investigate anything else, research on this problem, or any problem related to it, is forbidden. The end-result is virtually total ignorance of the human body, no medical arts to speak of, no surgical arts whatever; the sick or injured are cast out, in horror, to die.

Ketan's search for answers to this problem lead to investigations of the nature of Kronweld itself, a curiously-circumscribed land, surrounded by deserts and rings of deadly radiation. It leads to larger and more complicated mysteries, the discovery of enemies determined to annihilate Kronweld, and the revelation of the formation of the Kronweld society, in a maze of plot-threads that grow more fantastic and involved, chapter by chapter.

The end-result is a very long novel which maintains interest, and is supercharged with social and political ideas, fascinatingly presented and worked out; but it is also naive in plot-structure, rather stilted in characterization, and all so utterly cosmic as to be laughable in spots.

Jones has developed quite a bit since this first novel was written, and it is too bad that it was not revised for book-publication. The way in which the paragraphing is

broken up makes the book difficult to read, and I, for one, found it extremely irritating.

I do not believe that everything should be made easy to read and to understand at a glance, so have no objection to perusing a story as intricate and complex as this—providing that my final appraisal shows that the effort was worth it; it often happens that an author cannot say what he has to say in a manner which you can see at a quick glance; you will have to put some effort into it yourself. If it turns out that this was necessary, then there shouldn't be any complaint.

In the case of this novel, I'm not too sure that the results are really rewarding for the reader who wants to follow the work through. It isn't that there are so many questions treated, but that the melodrama has overwhelmed them, and the treatment remains, after all is said and done, rather superficial. Any one of the main problems would have sufficed to make a meaningful story, equally as long; what we have is a glorified comic-strip, with bright ideas and interesting theories scattered like milkweed in a high wind. It's exciting, all right, and I don't regret having suffered through the exasperating set-up of miniature paragraphs mentioned above—but the book is by no means what it should have been.

GROFF CONKLIN, who has given us such enjoyable collections as "The Best of Science-Fiction", "A Treasury of Science-Fiction", "The Big Book of Science-Fiction", and the "Science-Fiction Galaxy" (no connection between the latter and the magazine, *Galaxy Science-Fiction*) has maintained his record with "Possible Worlds of Science-Fiction" (Vanguard, \$2.95). The

stories are presented in two categories: The Solar System, and The Galaxy; in the first section, I wouldn't call any of the selections outstanding, though all but two definitely good, for my money, and can stand re-reading. I'd list Belknap Long's "Cones", Van Vogt's "Enchanted Village", and St. Clair's "The Pillows" as best. At the bottom of the list, for me, is Bradbury's "Asleep in Armageddon"—the usual adolescent rubbish, though not as sloppy as most of his exhibits—and, surprisingly, Heinlein's "Black Pits of Luna"—a worthwhile attempt, in itself, but all surface; it's slick as a "top" t.v. show, and trite.

The second section has all the merits of the first, plus extra value in Anderson's thoughtful and thought-provoking, "The Helping Hand", and Leinster's equally-fine "Propagandist". I found better-than-usual character-treatment in Schmitz' "Second Night of Summer" and considerable pleasure in Fyfe's "In Value Deceived", Simak's "Limiting Factor", and Merwin's "Exit Line". The others strike me as lesser productions, for one reason or another, but none inferior enough to warrant my singling them out for complaint. All in all, I'm happy to keep this volume.

I DO NOT bother to hang on to all the books sent me for review—my bookshelves groan bitterly as it is—but even if there were space, I doubt if I'd bother to keep "Far Boundaries", August Derleth's supplement to "Beyond Time and Space". (Pellegrini and Cudahy, \$2.95). Of somewhat less than 300 pages of text, the first 56 are devoted to Mr. Derleth's reiterations of how far back science-fiction can be traced, and exhibits which (as did the exhibits in the first volume) thoroughly disprove his theories. The second section contains two moderately-enjoyable tales—Highstone's "Frankenstein — Unlimited!" and Jacobi's "Tepondicon"—and three more which are nothing of the kind. None of the five are really representative of the period from which they were selected—unless one wants to consider "Infinity Zero" as a fairly well-written, but far from fresh, treatment of a theme already worked to death.

The final section has some very fine stories: Leinster's "De Profundis"; Belknap Long's "Invasion"; Paul Carter's "Ounce of Prevention"; Nelson Bond's "And Lo! The Bird", and Leiber's enjoyable "Later Than You Think". For those who have not gone through their Saroyan period, we also have two snippets from the usual rubbish by Bradbury.

Considering that duplications are beginning to appear in anthologies, I think it quite likely that the best in this selection will turn up elsewhere, and I'd recommend patience—the choice stories may appear in a better package.

MR. DERLETH'S collection, "The Outer Reaches", also published by Pellegrini and Cudahy, \$3.95, is quite another matter. Seventeen well-known science-fiction authors: Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, Nelson Bond, Ray Bradbury, Cleve Cartmill, L. Sprague de Camp, David H. Keller, Henry Kuttner, Fritz Leiber, Murray Leinster, Frank Belknap Long, Fletcher Pratt, Clifford Simak, Clark Ashton Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, A.E. Van Vogt, and Donald Wandrel were chosen to select their own, personal, favorite productions and asked to tell why they made their choice.

This is not, nor does it pretend to be, a collection of the "best" stories by the above-named authors; what it offers is insight into the personalities and viewpoints of a group of writers with whom most science-fiction readers will be familiar. It often happens that we will retain a particular fondness for a story we have read, but which we cannot claim to be as good, or better, than others of the same type which have been acknowledged as outstanding. Here, too, the author's reason for selecting the story is frequently of more interest than the story itself.

Poul Anderson selected "Interloper", because, among a number of his yarns he particularly liked, this one was highly praised by readers and critics whose judgment he respects; Isaac Asimov chose "Death Sentence" because the writing of this story, and its sale, represented a crucial point in his career as an author; to Nelson Bond, "This Is the Land" represents one of his most successful efforts, in that it came closest to realizing his intentions in writing it. (A very telling point; many authors exhibit dissatisfaction, sometimes outright distress, in relation to what is often judged their finest work simply because, for all that, it fell far short of what they had wanted to say.)

Ray Bradbury chooses "Ylla", because, after reworking it many times, he finally achieved a finished version which he has not since felt could still have been improved (another source of writer's woe; the number of authors who feel, "it wasn't bad, but just one more re-write..." is legion); Cleve Cartmill picks his favorite story produced since he was last anthologized, his nomination being "The Green Cat"; "Git Along" is L. Sprague de Camp's selection, on the grounds that it gave him more pleasure in the writing than any other short story to date, and he still gets a kick out of re-reading it; to David H. Keller, "Service Firat" represents a high-point of prediction, an element he favors in science-fiction; Henry Kuttner feels that the "Utopia" theme in science-fiction has been accompanied by a great deal of deadly nonsense, and he likes his own "Shock" because it offers counteraction to such.

Fritz Leiber contends that "The Ship Sails At Midnight" offers a good example

of the type of emphasis that differentiates science-fiction from other types of stories; Murray Leinster chooses "The Power" because it contained a theme hitherto untreated in science-fiction, and makes a point he considers valid; to Frank Belknap Long, "The Critters" achieved something he considers very important in science-fiction—a touch of verisimilitude which can make a story convincing in spite of debatable scientific assumptions; Fletcher Pratt likes his "Pardon My Mistake", because in it he re-examined some important aspects of space-travel heretofore taken for granted, and the re-examination points up a good deal of romantic nonsense which other writers will do well to avoid; "Good Night, Mr. James" is dear to Clifford Simak, because he feels he attained a high level of craftsmanship in working it out.

Clark Ashton Smith chooses, "The Plutonian Drug" because it contains a fascinating field of speculation, and has not become dated, even though it was published first in 1934; Theodore Sturgeon had something he wanted to say in "Farewell to Eden", and feels that he said it well; A. E. Van Vogt likes to write stories with "sweep" and dramatic power, and selects "Co-operate—or Else!" as a highwatermark of its kind, and Donald Wandrei favors "Finality, Unlimited" because it summed up the "general and specific philosophy" of living, which he held at the time, more completely than any other story he had written.

In the instances of authors who chose their selection because they believed the story had accomplished specific things, the reader will have a chance to compare his own impressions of what the writer actually said and did, as opposed to what *the author thought he said* and did. Simply as an anthology of stories by the "names included, the collection would be disappointing, for most of the scribes represented have done better; on its own terms, presented as a study in auctorial personality and viewpoint, I find it most interesting, and would like to see more. So, if you are already familiar with a fair sampling sto-

ries by the authors included here, I think you will find "The Outer Reaches" rewarding. I can't, however, recommend it to those who are just beginning to read science-fiction; nor would I suggest that you start with this collection if you have not purchased any science-fiction anthologies before.

PermaBooks have sent me a copy of "Beyond the End of Time", 19 selections, edited by Frederik Pohl. Since the price is only \$5c, recommendation would almost follow as a matter of course, unless the selection were decidedly inferior. It isn't; while a number of stories are no better or worse than the average, readable tale in a current magazine, the inclusion of such stories as "The Embassy", by Martin Person; "The Little Black Bag", by C. M. Kornbluth; "The Lonely Planet", by Murray Leinster, and "Rescue Party" by Arthur C. Clarke, make it equivalent to an issue which would be remembered.

I regret that time did not permit my reading a few stories here I hadn't seen before, but since I'd recommend the collection even if I didn't like any of these, it's rather pointless to withhold that recommendation.

A. E. Van Vogt's excellent "Voyage of the Space Beagle", retitled "Mission Interplanetary", is now available in a 25c in a Signet Edition, with a attractive and appropriate cover. If you do not already have this novel, it's one not to be missed. ...And if you've never had the chance to read Robert Heinlein's deservedly-famous novelet, "Universe", Dell Books has issued a very attractive edition, with a good cover by Robert Stanley, for which they ask only ten cents. (I hope we'll be seeing more science-fiction in this series.)

★



Coming Next Issue

SCENT OF DANGER

by William Morrison &

Harry Nix

TIME GOES TO NOW

by Charles Dye

Complete Novelet

by Vaseleos Garson

GOBLIN PLANETOID



Frazee's dying words had been, "If Butch comes back, kill him!" But Joe Banion couldn't believe Frazee meant it. Kill this blue-eyed baby, this symbol of hope to exiled Earthlings? Then Joe caught a look in the baby's eyes, after Butch had been found and brought back, and he began to understand . . .

JOE BANION came back alone. Just before the narrow trail turned and fanned out into the clearing, where the survivors of the wreck had built lean-tos to shelter them from the freezing blasts when the swift nightfall of this uncharted planetoid struck, Banion halted.

I haven't the guts to tell them, he thought. But they'll know something's wrong when I come back alone. I don't

look as if I've been on a picnic, anyway. He touched his left eye, fingering it tenderly, tentatively to see if the swelling had gone down any. The six-inch gash in his left leg throbbed painfully under the bandage he'd fashioned from the skirt of his tunic.

But the pain in his eye and the throb in his leg were nothing to the pain in his belly. Hunger's bad enough, but pump a little fear, and a little horror in, too...

Before he moved on down the path, Banion looked carefully back along the trail. *I think they'll stay back there. They told me they would, but after what they did to Jim and Tom, I'm afraid to believe them.*

It's so beautiful out there, too—like a miniature Earth. But they say it belongs to them, and we can't go there.

Joe tried not to limp, when he came out of the sheltering forest into the clearing's ankle-deep grass. But the effort broke open a new scab under the bandage and he could feel warm blood seeping out. He halted.

Karen saw him first. It was her sudden movement which attracted his good eye toward her. She'd been lying in front of the lean-to she'd helped him build, and had come to her feet with swift, easy grace. Her clean-limbed body poised for an instant, then she was running swiftly toward him, her unbound dark hair streaming out like a soft cloud.

This was heaven to us when we crashed. We thought it was blind, dumb luck that—of all the places in this strange system—our derelict ship should plunge upon a tiny replica of Earth. Heaven, we thought; but it's Hell, instead. He watched Karen's swift-footed approach, tried to twist his face into the quizzical smile she loved so well.

But I guess the smile is pretty lopsided, he admitted to himself as Karen's pace slowed. Ten feet away, she halted. She stood there, her firm, high breasts rising and falling swiftly,

a tremble in her slim, soft body. Her eyes, chameleonlike—which turned from blue to green to hazel, depending upon her mood—were very deep blue and very soft now as they roved over him... from the bruised and battered left eye, over the ripped tunic, to the bandaged leg.

"You're hurt, Joe," she said softly, walked slowly toward him, those blue eyes searching his face. She stood looking at him quietly, her small hands gently squeezing his wrists.

"Not very much," he replied, gently disengaging his wrists by raising his arms and cradling her face in his hands. *It just misses being heart-shaped, he thought, by having such a firm jaw. I'm glad of that.*

HE KISSED her, almost savagely. "Not half so much as being away from you," he added, and nipped at the soft curve of her cheek.

"Barbarian!" she said, pulling away, laughing.

The laughter suddenly retreated from her face and voice. "Where's Tom?" she asked. "And Jim?"

He jerked his dark head, tried to say lightly, "Back there."

She looked at him, and he thought, *I can't lie to her when she looks at me like that; not when it's her brother—not even to save her from hurt.*

But he said, "We found a way out. They're back yonder, waiting for us." *They're waiting, he thought, they'll wait forever, and they'll never know whether we come.*

Karen must have seen the truth in his eyes. "You're lying, Joe; something's happened. You never did have a poker-face. What is it?" She placed her hands on his shoulders, looked at him.

I haven't the heart to tell her—not yet; it'll be bad enough when there's nothing left. But not now—when there still can be hope for her and the rest.

"They're all right," he said, and he

almost believed the tone of his own voice.

That soft face of hers grew harsh. "You're lying, Joe; if they're all right, how were they hurt?"

"That's just it," he said, leaping for the opening. "They stayed to widen the trail and dig out wider foot-holds in the cliff; they figured I wasn't much good after I tangled with the beast."

"Oh," Karen said.

She wants to believe it. She must believe, even if for only a little while. There isn't much time for happiness left.

"The beast?" she repeated.

He nodded. "This planetoid has some peculiar creatures that Earth never saw. I mixed with one, and didn't do so well."

She's believing, he thought. If only the others keep believing, too!

Karen relaxed, one fist brushed softly against his chin, and said, "Let's get on to camp; I'll do some nursing on that eye and leg."

THE NIGHT was a cold, black wind when Joe Banion held the square branch-and-vine fashioned cover tight against the opening of Karen's lean-to while she fastened it. "Goodnight," he called through the moaning wind, and worked his way against the stiff arms of it to his own shelter.

As he pulled the opening shut, the wind brought him the wail of Mrs. Larson's infant.

He lay there in the dark. Not even his birthright for that chubby, blue-eyed Butch; not a chance ever to grow up, even on an alien world far from the loveliness that once was Earth.

And only for a little while will there be hope for these half-hundred others here. Am I doing wrong in not telling them the truth? That we are imprisoned in this rock-guarded valley—that we were given only a glimpse of the Promised Land?

We could live here in this valley,

grubbing in the day for insects and fruit, freezing in the night, forever if need be—if it weren't for them—the Watchers.

They told me they'd stay back there, all right. They wouldn't come into the valley to kill us. This valley is tabu for them. But they can send their beasts to hunt us down; that isn't tabu.

He touched the bandage on his left thigh, remembering.

Joe Banion didn't want to go to sleep particularly, but his weary body numbed his brain.



It was the silence which first drew his numbed brain to wakefulness. Then came the sound, low and with its remembered note of horror—the satisfaction-growl of the beasts.

Last came a thin baby wail, suddenly and abruptly stifled.

Banion had scrambled out of his lean-to into a night that, for the first time since they crashed, was holding its breath. Then he heard a scream, the tortured shriek of a woman; it came from the direction of Mrs. Larson's lean-to.

Joe lunged through the dark toward the scream, his mind writhing at the saw-toothed horror and despair in it. The smell of the beasts was in his nostrils, a smell that lifted the short hairs on his neck and twisted his lips into a snarl.

The scream was so close now he could feel the sound of it.

"Mrs. Larson," he said urgently. The screaming stopped suddenly; in its place came laughter, high-pitched and hysterical. And the smell of the beasts...! Banion flung himself flat on the ground as the sudden, strong reek struck at him.

THE LOW growl was very close as Banion's fingers searched the ground around him for a rock. A

heavy shaking of the earth on which he lay came at the same moment his searching fingers found a stone. He lashed out with the rock at the dark shadow that loomed above him. His weapon skidded off the tough, scaly hide of the beast. He twisted away but a glancing blow from the creature threw him into a tree stunning him.

The ground quivered at the passage of the beast. In the strange quiet, he heard its rumbling breath as it moved away.

Mrs. Larson still was laughing, shrill, hurting echoes of it darting about on frightened wings.

Then the night let loose its pent-up breath; wind shrieked and howled about him, taking that laughter with it so that he caught only snatches of it. Still half-stunned, he crawled through the dark until he was so close to Mrs. Larson the wind could not snatch her laughter away.

Quietly, he reached out, found her shoulder. He drew his hand back suddenly as five streaks of fire burned into it; Mrs. Larson clawed at him. He reached out again, this time with his voice, too. "Shut up," he said bluntly. "It's Banion." He caught the clawing fingers this time, groped, caught the other wrist tightly. He twisted at her wrists, hoping pain would shock her from the hysteria.

Her laughter stopped, and Mrs. Larson began to sob and whimper. He heard shouting then, distilled and thinned by the wind, and turned; lights were flickering in the camp as aroused humans sought the source of the sounds that had awakened them.

Joe shouted. One of the lights pierced the blackness, flickered over him and the sobbing woman in his arms.

Big John Frazee was the first to reach them, the storm-light probing out ahead of him. Frazee's bull voice roared through the storm-sound, "What in hell's the matter?"

Banion pointed mutely to Mrs. Larson's leanto, revealed in the glare of

the storm lamp. The shelter was ripped from its stakes and smashed flat, the twigs and small logs which once formed it splintered and ripped as if trampled by heavy feet.

"Butch!" Joe shouted to Frazee through the wind. The big hulking bulk of Frazee moved swiftly then; he pawed through the wreck of the leanto, carefully. His pawing, gentle at first, became finally vicious.

Even through the roar of the wind, Frazee's muttered curses carried to Banion's ears. The curses echoed Banion's.

Butch, the chubby, blue-eyed kid who was the camp's favorite, had disappeared. The beasts of the Watchers had taken the baby—Butch, whose birthplace was the star-trails, whose squalling cries, while the spaceship shuddered in death-agony as an awry atomic engine sealed the rocket-ports shut, were a trumpet-call rallying bruised and disorganized Earthlings.

Joe lifted the whimpering woman, carried her against the stiff thrusts of the wind to his own leanto. He was rubbing her wrists when a soft hand on his shoulder pushed him aside.

Karen said, "They need you outside, Joe; I'll take care of Arline."

CHAPTER II

BANION stepped once more into the wind-lashed night, moved toward the huddle of flickering lights and the roaring of Frazee's voice.

Frazee was shouting and gesticulating, surrounded by the half-hundred other Earthlings, mostly women and younger children.

Joe pushed through the group and caught Frazee's words. "Don't be a bunch of hysterical old women," the big man roared at the few men who stood fidgeting, their lights flashing around haphazardly—as if to stave off an unknown menace.

"So what if we don't have guns? We've got knives and clubs. Are you going to let those things steal our kids? Let's follow them; we can't let little Butch just go.

"Who'll go with me?"

One of the fidgeting men spoke up, almost defensively. "It's not that we're afraid to face things, Frazee. But in this night and wind we couldn't find anything, anyway."

Banion touched Frazee on the arm. "Mac's right, John; we don't know where it's gone, and we'd be hopelessly lost once out of this clearing."

Frazee threw off Joe's hand. "You, too?" he roared. "I thought you had a little guts; that's why I voted you as leader. But you're like the rest of these old women." He jerked a thumb at the fidgeting men.

"By Gawd, I'm going alone!" he roared. He spun his big body around, plunged in the general direction of the trail, his light bobbing along beside him.

"Wait!" Banion shouted through the roaring wind; "you're a fool to go alone."

Joe plunged after Frazee's hulking figure, his eyes fixed on the bobbing light. In a few moments, the light disappeared. Frazee was moving swiftly; Banion, without a light, impeded by the twists in the trail and the bushes, fell behind.

Banion floundered off the trail; with a dull sense of shock realized that he didn't have the slightest idea how he could find his way back to it. He battled on through the bushes, smashing against trees.

Then he saw a light—like a miniature searchlight—probing upward into the dark. He moved toward it recklessly; it should be bobbing, he thought, unless something has happened to Big John.

The smell of the beasts came to him. He halted only a few yards from where the light probed upward, waited. The smell was stronger here. Cautiously, he inched forward; one quest-

ing foot touched a soft obstruction in his path. He bent down, his fingers searching.

Light from the up-slanting ray reflected from the trees nearby and he saw Big John Frazee's eyes staring at him.

Joe bent lower. There still was intelligence in those staring eyes. "It's Banion, John," he said.

Frazee just blinked his eyes. His lips moved, but Banion could hear no words. The wind snatched the weak mouthings away. Joe bent closer.

"I met one of *Them*," Frazee's words came weakly. "They hate us, Joe; don't let them beat us."

Banion's hands slipped along Frazee's body, seeking his injuries. Frazee's arms were bloody, mashed pulp. Joe's hands searched lower.

BANION began to curse, then, quietly, emotionlessly. A fierce determination burned in his heart.

The Watchers were alien, inhuman; they had to be destroyed. First they had ripped the bodies of Tom and Jim; then one of their Beasts had taken Butch Larson. They were playing rougher now.

Big John Frazee was big no longer. He could never stand, his two powerful legs spread, roaring out his advice, his commands, or his jokes. Big John could never stand on his own two feet again. He had no legs. There were only stumps where they should have been.

Joe looked again at Frazee's face. He bent down again when he saw the lips writhing. "If Butch comes back," Frazee said. "Kill him. Understand? Kill him, Joe. *Kill him!*"

The howling, gusting wind seized on Frazee's words.

Big John died quietly. His dying words burned in Banion's mind. Kill Butch!

Kill Butch? Kill a chubby baby who should be guarded from harm. Destroy a child who hadn't had a chance even to live? Why?

Joe picked up Frazee's fallen storm light, clicked it off. He stood motionless in the darkness, braced against the whipping, chilling wind.

What had Frazee meant by his last words? Were they the ravings of a mind unhinged by the pain? Or were they the sharp, clear thoughts given to Frazee by the hovering black wings of death?

Banion shivered. It wasn't just because of the chilling wind.

Joe Banion had kept a shivering vigil over Frazee's body for nearly four hours before the darkness and the wind dissipated—as swiftly as they had struck—and the pear-shaped sun warmed his frozen bones.

Besides warmth, the sun brought direction. Joe recognized the portion of the trail. Tenderly, he lifted Frazee's legless corpse, carried it to the side of the trail, covering it with brush temporarily until he could return and give the fallen giant proper burial.

Then he set out for the camp.

The warm sun beating down on him made his muscles, already loose because of lack of sleep, more languid; he found it difficult to blink the tiredness from his eyes. But when he reached the trail-turning, where it fanned out into the camp clearing, his tired eyes snapped back to life and the languor fled from his body.

There was no sign of life in the camp; no wispy columns of smoke from cooking fires; no movement of Earthlings; no echoes of talk. To the rousing shout of query that halloed from Banion's lips, there was no answer.

His tired gait shifted into a run. He halted first at Karen's lean-to. He jerked off the branch-and-vine door covering, glanced inside. Karen was gone.

He tried a half-dozen more lean-tos before he finally believed that the Earthlings had departed; he could not

tell from appearances whether they had left hurriedly. The only sign of disorder was the smashed lean-to which had been occupied by Mrs. Larson and Butch.

The sense of loss struck deep at first and colored his thoughts. Then his intelligence placed a gentle rein upon his thoughts and calmed him.

It was only natural that they should leave this place—a place which in a single night had caused the destruction of a hut and the disappearance of an infant, a place from which two of their fellows had plunged into the darkness of a strange night and had failed to return.

Only natural to leave this alien place and seek comfort in familiar things—the wrecked spaceship. Smashed and useless as it was, it represented their last tie with the world that had borne them.

H E'D BEEN right, after all, Banion decided when he'd tramped deeper into the valley—to the spot where the silver-and-black space ship had crashed.

There were the cooking-fires and the movement of people. They moved in the shadow of a broken dream—the twisted and torn duralloy skeleton of the ship they had boarded with new hope in their hearts. They'd been chosen by lot for this first ship which was to take them away from an Earth ravaged by a blight which sucked the life from its soil, dissipated its waters, and left a people hungry despite every possible effort to produce synthetic food.

Synthetics could stave off death from starvation; but as months and years went by, and Earthlings grew scrawnier and weaker, as carefully-husbanded herds of livestock depleted themselves due to the lack of plant food.

Then a foolproof spaceship—which wasn't foolproof after all—was designed and tested. Scientists probing and examining spectrum indications

proclaimed a livable planet. Then, finally, the first ship was completed—the *Liberator*—first of thousands to be built to carry mankind across the void to a rebirth.

But the *Liberator* had trouble from the very start. When it zoomed upward from its mile-long, steel-rollered cradle, it veered from its calculated course and was flung haphazardly toward a new destiny.

The Moon's gravitational pull was so strong that the atomic motors were thrust into full power for the first time; one engine blew up, killing a dozen of the chosen men.

The atomic power released played havoc with radio-communications, threw instruments awry, and the ship's captain—Peter Mallett—navigated by guess and by faith.

More trouble developed as the *Liberator* probed deeper into space. Mallett died of space-burns, raving and screaming. With him died a half-dozen more of the crew who had braved the exterior of the ship, in order to replace a series of exhaust tubes. Their deaths were in vain; another engine went bad, sealed the rocket ports shut and blew off the whole aft part of the ship.

It was during the hell of flame and explosion, while the Earthlings welded the broken ship, that Butch was born. Then the ship plunged toward this planetoid to crash.

This was it—the shattered broken hulk of a dream.

BANION tramped closer toward the wreck, his eyes seeking Karen.

His approach was noticed quickly, and the Earthlings stared at him in disbelief. Some were gathered in a little group near the ruptured belly of the space ship, kneeling and standing, their attention riveted on something in the center of the group. These did not notice his approach.

They were chuckling and giggling when he walked up quietly to them.

One of them stepped aside when he pushed easily into the group and he saw what held their attention.

Lying on a pad of blankets, waving his chubby legs and arms and chuckling at all the attention was Mrs. Larson's infant boy, Butch.

So Butch had come back; Joe grinned. The baby was a symbol of hope, of survival despite great odds. There was a warm feeling inside Banion that spread.

It was good to have the little brat back.

Then he remembered Frazee—Frazee who, with his dying breath, had pleaded, "*If Butch comes back, kill him! Understand? Kill him!*"

Big John Frazee must have been dead with pain to imagine this chuckling, gurgling babe as some terrible plague. Why, that blue-eyed Butch was the symbol of everything man had fought and died for ever since the days he clubbed his way above the beasts who fought with tooth and claw. Butch represented the eternal life of man.

And just look at Mrs. Larson! Butch's return was renewed life for her. She crouched nearby, just savoring the sight of him, her eyes sparkling and joyous.

Butch was master of all he surveyed, and his blue eyes were taking in everyone and everything. He focused his glance on Joe Banion. His round fat face grinned widely when he saw Joe, and he gurgled, stretching out one chubby hand.

Joe Banion, leaning forward, held out a forefinger. Butch clutched it and gurgled faster.

Banion just grinned.

CHAPTER III

A FEW HOURS later, Banion and Karen were talking—Joe earnestly, Karen throwing in a question now and then.

"We can't stay in this valley forever, Karen. We've got to get where there's food, where there are animals for food and for clothing. We'll just waste away on fruits and insects; we must get out of this valley to survive."

"But, Joe—they like it here. And the most convincing argument is one they won't talk about; they're afraid of what's outside the valley."

"But they don't know, Karen. It's beautiful out there. Why...just the brief glimpse I got of it showed me that. This planetoid is teeming with game, with all sorts of fruit-trees and berry-bushes."

"Yes," she answered, her eyes thoughtful. "But with game, there are hunters...beasts of terror. Look what the one did with you." She was silent for a moment.

Then; "What did Tom and Jim think about it, Joe? Aren't they coming back to join us?"

There it is again, Joe thought desperately. Shall I tell her that her brother, Tom Blake, lies ripped and torn beside the body of Jim Welch—back there at the foot of the cliff? Tell her about the Watchers and their beasts?

"When we climbed to the top of the cliff," he said slowly, "it was like going into paradise. I've never seen such beauty; it was just as if all the artists who'd ever painted scenes of earth got together to collaborate on a masterpiece.

"It was so beautiful, it hurt."

Careful, Joe, say nothing more. You've told the truth—if not the whole truth.

"They like it?" Karen asked. Joe nodded. "It was everything we'd ever dreamed of finding and more."

"How long will they wait there if we don't show up pretty soon?"

Forever! They'll wait there forever, and they won't be worried... Easy, Joe. Aloud, Banion said, "Oh, I don't know. They'll give us plenty of time; then they'll probably come back, seeking us."

Karen said thoughtfully; "I think the three of you are right; we can hardly stay right here. And even if there is danger there it can't be any worse than here. What you've told me of Frazee..." She shuddered.

Banion got up quickly, started for the rest of the Earthlings, who chilled by fear of this unknown place were huddled together near the ship for warmth from their misgivings.

They were talking of the homes they'd left behind, wondering if any others had escaped from the starving Earth. They spoke of homely things; of the feel of the night Earthwind against hot cheeks; of the smell of clover and hay; of the motley colors, sounds and scents of Earth. But they repeated only what their parents and grandparents had related to them; they had no knowledge themselves, having been born into a barren world.

HE WALKED into the midst of them, said harshly; "The past is gone, and nothing can be done about it; it's the future that matters. Do you want to stay here, living a life meant only for the weakest of creatures? Or do you want to fight and die like men, knowing that if you win you have won a paradise? That if you die, it won't matter, because you have lost nothing except a few years of a grubby existence?"

His words made little impression upon them.

"Doc" Cantling looked up from his work of suturing a laceration in his tunic. "You'd make a good evangelist, Joe," he said dryly. "But you're too abstract. Show them some material gain by fighting. They're living now; you're just offering them death."

Banion looked searchingly at the wizened old surgeon. The doctor ran a thin quivering hand through his thick head of white hair. "You've got the right idea, but the wrong inducements." He smiled slowly, went back to his tunic operation.

Joe looked around at the other Earthlings. They were hungry, tattered, and gaunt but they were alive. Banion thought of Big John Frazee, his mutilated body lying beside the trail.

He felt like I did and wanted to do something about it. He fought and died. They didn't and still live.

Maybe it is better to just drift along, he thought.

Then he saw Butch, sleeping cradled in his mother's arms. In that helpless baby lay all the past glories and wealth of mankind. He was man's reason for being, his destiny. And man's destiny was not to lie down and grovel in the dust but to reach upward for the farflung stars.

Banion said suddenly: "I want a couple of men to help me bury Big John Frazee; you, Martin, and you, Lords."

The pair stood up reluctantly, as if loathe to leave the comforting circle of comradeship; but they came along.

By the time, the three had dug a grave, and patted the last shovelful of dirt down upon Frazee's body, Martin and Lords were shaking with horror and fear. When they started back to the *Liberator*, Lords grew violently ill and retched agonizingly.

Martin asked Banion in a quavery voice. "Are the beasts outside as bad as the one which did that?"

Joe shrugged. "I don't know," he said; "but I suppose they are."

"And is there game outside?" he asked.

"That I do know. I saw animals that looked like deer pictured in the old Earth books. And there must be others."

Martin said nothing more, walked quietly behind Banion along the trail.

WEARY from lack of sleep, the wandering and the burial, Joe

Banion curled up under a tree when they returned to the ship and fell asleep. In what seemed only moments to him, he was awakened by a hand shaking his shoulder.

It was Doc Cantling. He was smiling wryly. "Hello, evangelist," he said. "They want to know if tomorrow morning is soon enough to start out of the valley."

Joe sat up, rubbing sleep out of his eyes, and muttered, "What?"

The doc explained. "You gave them something material when you took Lords and Martin to bury Big John. Those two have become your disciples; they've been inciting the whole camp for a exodus from this place. Not because of what's someplace else but the terrible beasts that are here."

"But the beasts are just as bad in the plateau," Banion put in.

"Certainly," agreed the doctor. "But they know what the beasts here do; they'll take their chances on something they hope is better, rather than see or hear about any more burials as described by Lords and Martin."

"Tomorrow is fine," Banion said. "We'll leave at dawn to get at the foot of the cliff before dusk."

Doc Cantling moved away.

Well, Joe, there it is. You are now about to lead the lambs to slaughter by the Watchers and their Beasts. Blindfolded by lack of knowledge, they will follow you trustingly. You will lead them to what they think is a new world as rich and promising as Earth once was. Instead you will urge them into hellish oblivion.

Then they'll fight to live, Banion told himself savagely.

Dawn was like a tonic, the wind-washed air gentle, reassuring. Smells were fresh, clean. Sounds seemed new but neither alien nor fearsome.

God's in his heaven; all's right with the world, thought Banion as he watched the little colony of a half-

hundred humans pack up their meager goods. He looked them over, identifying them to himself—Martin, Lords, Dob Cantling, the Smyth twins, Lochevsky, Weiss, Oubenet—ah, there's Karen—McKinnon, Swift...

But where's Butch and Mrs. Larson?

For a moment, he remembered Big John Frazee's final words. "*Kill Butch! Understand, Kill him!*"

He strode to the spaceship, looked into the cubicle which housed Butch and his mother.

The fear in his breast subsided. They were sleeping, the mother curled around the baby. Quietly, Joe Banion stepped inside, started to shake Mrs. Larson by the shoulder, saying quietly, "Get up you sleepy-heads; we're leaving."

The words did not stir Mrs. Larson, although they wakened Butch who began to stretch and wriggle.

Banion, his hand on Mrs. Larson's shoulder, stood silently for a long moment. Then he spun on his heel.

Outside, he shouted: "Doc Cantling."

THE OLD doctor dropped his bundle of blankets and raced toward the ship, his black bag swinging beside him. He didn't stop to ask Joe anything, but slipped into the cubicle. Banion followed slowly.

The doc's examination was quick efficient. "Dead," he said. "Her heart just couldn't take the double shock—loss of Butch and his miraculous return."

The fear in Banion's heart subsided again. *For a moment*, he thought grimly, *I felt like throttling Butch*. He looked at the baby pityingly. Father killed in a space accident; mother dead on an alien world—a bleak heritage for one so young.

So helpless... Unknowning of all that was going on... Unknowning? Joe's hazel eyes suddenly narrowed; had he surprised a calculating look on that baby's face: He cast the thought aside when Butch began to bawl.

Joe Banion picked up the baby, awkwardly tried to quiet his squalls.

With the infant cradled in his arms and Doc Cantling beside him, Banion stepped out of the cubicle to face the others, drawn by the doctor's hurried entrance.

Joe looked at them. "He's ours now; his mother's dead. We must find a place to live where he can grow up the way a man should."

Banion lifted Butch over his head, and Butch squealed happy little squeals at the sensation.

Just before the half-hundred humans began to start the long tramp to the edge of the valley, Banion looked back at the rough-hewed wooden cross that shone dully in the reflected light from the ruptured spaceship. The cross marked Mrs. Larson's grave. It well could mark the grave of all these other humans—the last milestone of a destiny which from that first had been ill-starred.

Joe hoisted Butch to his right shoulder, marched to the head of the column.

A little child shall lead them. Banion grinned to himself. Then he chuckled. A pants-wetting, wet-mouthed little creature, alive to every new sensation, with a mind plastic to new impressions.

He grinned. "Just that, Karen. I was just thinking what crazy fools Earthmen are; we fight like mad to protect little brats like Butch. A lot of times that was more important than holding a job, living or anything else. We lose sleep when they wet their britches. Which reminds me..."

Banion turned, glanced down the line, saw the piquant features of Jane Wilson, Big John Frazee's girl, flaccid in loneliness at the loss of the big guy. He called, "Jane!"

She looked up listlessly. "I've a job for you," he urged. To Karen beside

him he said quietly, "Maybe it will take her mind off Big John." He halted until the line brought Jane to him.

"Here," he said gruffly, handing Butch to her; "the little brat needs attention." He patted his tunic shoulder gingerly where Butch had perched. A little of the listlessness disappeared from Jane's face. "He's not a brat," she declared, "he's cute." She took him possessively from Banion, began to administer proper treatment.

Joe grinned, reassumed his post at the head of the column.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOING was easy, at first; they followed the trail to the clearing where they had set up the now deserted camp. They marched quietly past the little camp.

Joe noticed mounting tension, and a cold lump lay heavy in his belly. Since he, and the two who had buried Big John Frazee, had passed through it on their return to the *Liberator*, destruction had swept through it.

Where before only the lean-to which had housed Mrs. Larson and Butch had been smashed and flattened to earth, now no lean-to was recognizable; all were in ruins. The woodshoots, the vines, the lianas which formed them were scattered through the clearing.

The Watchers had sent their Beasts to destroy it. The smell of Beasts still clung to the morning air, nauseating and fear-inspiring even in the bright sun's light.

Joe's hand crept toward his left side where the short, stub-bladed knife should have been. He remembered then; his knife was buried in the breast of a beast that had but flicked a scaly paw at it before it lashed out at him, hurling him aside to attack Tom and Jim.

Tom, Jim, Big John, Mrs. Larson—the list of the Beasts victims was

growing... And how could they be beaten?

The few men with knives in the group moved ahead to widen the narrow trail which led toward the plateau.

Karen said suddenly, "That's Big John's grave, Joe?"

"Yes," he answered and turned swiftly to glance at Jane. Her brown eyes were fixed upon the mound of earth beside the trail. One slim hand was brushing dark hair back from her forehead. Joe's eyes searched her sad face for a sign of hysteria, but the piquant face was quiescent; only the eyes were eloquent of her loss.

Then his eyes were drawn irresistibly to the baby cradled in the crook of her left arm.

A low curse spat from his lips, and Banion was striding swiftly toward Jane. With frenzied hands he snatched the baby from Jane's arm, lifted him high, every muscle strained to smash the helpless baby to earth.

"Damn you," he said coldly, unemotionally. "Damn you. Big John was right. You should have died when first I found you back at the ship."

"Joe!" it was Karen's frightened voice. "Are you mad? Don't harm Butch."

HE FELT the strong wiry hands of Doc Cantling on his wrists. "Easy, Joe, easy; that's a baby you plan to kill."

"Baby, hell!" Banion growled. "It may look like one, act like one, have the ingratiating ways of one. But inside it's rotten; a watcher is there. How do you think its mother died? How do you think it got back to the ship?"

"Joe, please!" That was Karen again.

"Big John warned me," Joe said doggedly. "*'If Butch comes back,'* he said, *'Kill him. Understand? Kill him, Joe. Kill him!'* I couldn't believe that a helpless babe like Butch could cause us any harm. But I know Big John

was right; I thought I caught a calculating look on its face when Mrs. Larson died. Just now I saw a look that no baby ever had; it was gloating at the sight of Big John's grave."

"You're a big upset, Joe," Doc Cantling put in quietly.

"Big John would never harm Butch; he loved Butch as if he were his own." That was Jane, who was striving to reach up to take Butch from Banion's high flung hands.

"I'm not upset," Joe growled. "Big John knew what was happening to Butch; he told me right here when he lay dying."

"Delirium," declared Doc Cantling. Then came Karen's voice, almost pitiful, "I'm sorry, Joe."

A great wave of shock and pain swept over Banion, then; his legs went flaccid, the trees whirled around him. He began to fall. *Karen, he thought, Karen struck me with a rock. Karen, you sweet but blinded fool. Big John and I are right. You must believe.*

Then consciousness washed away from him.

At first, it seemed as if he were in a deep hole with only a hint of light far above him. Then agony struck at his head, exploding it into shards of fire and blinding streaks of flickering colors. Pain and consciousness dashed into his brain hand and hand.

Joe sat up gingerly, his brain boiling over with shock and pain. "Karen," he whispered, staring around with hurt-blinded eyes. His vision cleared.

He was alone.

Then Joe began to laugh; the laughter frightened him, sent his aching head throbbing even worse.

The other Earthlings had deserted him, left him because he had seemingly gone berserk. And all because of the Thing in Butch's mind.

They had abandoned him, yes; but Joe could not abandon them—not

when he knew the power of the Thing which sat in that baby's plastic mind. Evil looking out of innocent blue eyes. Hate riding a pellucid mind. Destruction couched in pudgy hands.

Even Karen had deserted him. That hurt—most of all. But then he remembered. If he had told her how Jim and Tom had died; if he'd been frank with her, told her the truth, no matter how it hurt her... If he had told them all exactly what had happened, they wouldn't be marching toward oblivion now...

Joe Banion stood up... No use sighing about might-have-been. Ostracized or no, he had to protect them from their blindness.

Me, guardian angel, Banion thought, and chuckled even in the face of oblivion.

THEY HAD marched a long way while Banion lay unconscious from the rock Karen had wielded; it was after nightfall when he found them—guided by the flickering fireflies of their campfires.

Cautiously, he crept near the circle of fires, sought out Karen first. His eyes caressed her longingly; a peacefulness crept through his being at the sight of her, talking quietly to Doc Cantling.

Then he shuddered. His gaze was pulled from Karen's quiet loveliness; his hazel eyes froze when they sighted the eyes of little Butch.

Across the space between them, Joe felt the hatred and loathing dart from the Thing which sat behind the baby's eyes.

Banion's mind writhed, spewing out his own hatred and disgust at the Thing. All else was forgot but a desire to lash the creature with hate thoughts. He was aware only of a pair of blue eyes that dualed with his own. There was no feeling in his body; he could see nothing, hear nothing, sense nothing but the power of the Thing which slashed at his mind.

His brain was going numb, and he caught a surge of exultation from the

Thing in Butch's mind. *It's like drowning, he thought. You grow weaker and weaker. You're willing to gag on water just for a breath—even a smell—of fresh air...*

There was no emotion in his thoughts, as they went on, *My life is being sucked from me. And there isn't anything I can do about it.*

I cannot feel. I cannot see. I cannot hear. I cannot move.

Then a darting fear chilled him. Something! What was it? Something he could do, something was crawling, drilling, seeping through that numbness. A smell?

A smell. The unforgettable odor of the Watchers' Beasts; the Beasts were near.

The hypnosis broke suddenly. Banion flipped over on one side, just as the huge shadow over him lunged. Fear pumped tremendous quantities of adrenalin into his heart; his legs moved like mad, drawing him to his feet and flinging him away in startled, driven flight.

Low branches whipped at his face; forest debris and low plants clutched at his feet. He ran in a daze of blind terror as the hypnotic trance faded from his mind.

Joe stopped, finally, lungs heaving, heart thundering, legs shivering. He leaned limply against a tree, while his mind pulled itself together after the duel with the Thing in Butch's mind, and his body relaxed after its reckless flight.

For the first time Joe Banion was realizing the full power of the Watchers and their Beasts. Any creature could tear and rip the body, but a Thing that could make itself at home in a baby's mind...and, through the baby's eyes, reach into an Earthling's mind...how could you beat such antagonists?

If the Thing could work its way into an infant's plastic mind, why not into an adult's ego? Joe shuddered at the possibilities.

HE MUST let his fellow Earthlings know the dangers Butch posed for them. Through Karen? But Karen had struck him, permitted him to be left behind as the other Earthlings moved on through the valley.

But if Joe could win her to his side and, through her, convince Doc Cantling... There still was hope they could be warned. But what then? Kill Butch? But there were other children—not so young as Butch.

The creature, once having found a way into a baby's mind, would know the pattern of other older consciousnesses. You could go on killing indefinitely; it would merely defeat the purpose of Earthlings—to survive.

But his immediate problem was returning to the Earthlings' camp, Banion decided. His blind rush from the Beast had sent him into a labyrinth of trees, bushes and red thickets.

As that decision came into his mind, the fear hackles rose on his neck as the smell of the Watchers' Beasts struck sharply at his nostrils.

So he hadn't escaped them, after all...

Even in the darkness and the muted screaming of the nightwind through the trees, he sensed their heavy-footed approach. The reek of the Beasts was strongest in the direction he faced. He spun on his heel, and the smell was stronger there; he jerked his head first to the left, then to the right, his nostrils seeking the foul odor.

Despite the diminishing of the odor by the whipping wind, the scent was all about him. His flesh crawled with loathing as he sensed himself surrounded in the darkness. Barehanded, he flung himself at the presence around him.

He bounced from tough, scaly hide; he hurled himself back, and struck more of roughened hide. Joe sobered, walked quietly around in a foreshortened circle, his hands touching the scaly beings ringed around him. "What do you want?" he yelled into the wind.

There was no voice, no thought that answered Banion. But from one side the unseen creatures moved in, pushing Joe along.

That unearthly smell was so rancid now, his belly heaved and twisted in nausea. The Beasts moved inexorably, sweeping Banion along with them.

Their fangs, their claws were quiescent, now—why?

Each time he'd met them before, they'd sought to rip and kill. Now, they muzzled death, just kept nudging him along.

CHAPTER V

HERDED by the unseen, Banion, trudged through the darkness. Then the swift dawn of this world struck; once again, he gazed upon the Beasts.

He was circled by eight of them. Each stood about nine feet high, their horse-like heads twisting almost incessantly. They looked like pictures in old Earth books—pictures of creatures which roamed Earth in a day far before the advent of man. What had they been called—Tyrannosaurus Rex?

The Earth creatures were far larger than these, though their appearance was almost an exact copy. But there were the short, claw-studded forelegs, the huge jumping legs and the long, thickened tail.

Where were they taking him?

Abruptly, they came out on to a plain that crept ahead of them to end in the high towering cliff that Banion had seen last three days before. He looked at his captors. Light from the pear-shaped sun glinted off their green scaly hides, their white vicious teeth and claws; their red-flecked lidless eyes flickered over him.

The Beasts shunted Banion across the plain, toward a dark cleft in the cliff. When they arrived, and Joe saw the gradual ascent from the plain to the plateau, he knew how these strange creatures had come into the valley.

This would make a perfect entry to the promised land for Earthlings, he thought and added bitterly—if they knew about it.

Banion moved up the long trail. When the cleft opened wider and spread out over the plateau, Joe felt that same surge of hope and joy that had flooded over Jim and Tom and him when they had climbed the cliff and first saw this miniature of Earth. But the exultation was colored with bitterness, now.

Somewhere in the valley, the Earthlings were moving toward oblivion, the Watcher within Butch chuckling at their blindness and stupidity.

And me, Joe Banion—I'm on a one-way trip to hell, too. Only I know a little bit about it; they don't.

Joe heard weird music—and steeled himself. He and Jim and Tom had listened before and been confounded by it; now Jim and Tom were dead, and he was an outcast from his own kind and walking slowly toward death.

The music shrilled until it crept into soundlessness. As before, when he no longer could hear the music, the rainbow-pillars came.

The Beasts slunk away from him.

Banion stood facing the columns of color. An invader who had plumbed the depths of space to find a new home, facing the rulers of the new world—the Watchers. A puny alien against a homeworld armed with unknown but sure weapons.

The rainbow-columns flickered with energy. Banion braced his mind against them.

How will I die? Joe wondered as he waited for the thoughts to reach into him.

"We warned you, Stranger. You were not to trespass."

BANION laughed. What else could the Earthlings do? They had not set down upon this planet of their own choice; they could not leave it if they wished.

"You have seen our strength, Stranger, but you have not heeded our warnings. You shall die."

What would happen if I dashed at one of those columns? Only a part of Joe's mind was listening to the Watchers' thoughts.

"Yet before you died, Stranger, you must answer one question.

"What have you done with One?" The question whip-lashed, rousing Banion from his contemplation of the pulsating columns of color.

"One?" Joe asked. "One what?" His thought was as puzzled as his mind.

"One went into the valley in one of your spawn. At first we heard from him, but now he is gone; our Beasts cannot sense him anywhere."

Joe's mind reeled—and then his whole body shook with laughter. Even his mind joined in the mirth. The Watcher in Butch couldn't contact the others! There was hope, a slim bright thread of it in the destiny of these Earthlings now.

The irony of the Watchers' question stunned Joe. His laughter died, but his mind was shrieking in joy; if he could escape now, somehow wield One as a hostage for the Earthlings' safety...

Banion looked about him. The Beasts were nowhere in sight; only the columns of color pulsed before him.

"Answer!" The thought was a stab.

Joe closed his mind, waited.

The seconds dripped slowly away. The colorful columns were blurring before him, rainbow-colors were blending.

At last, there were columns of pure white—the rainbow-hues had vanished. The white was blinding and bored into Banion's eyes; he squeezed his lids shut but the images of those white columns burned through them as though they were made of chiffon.

Then...

"Answer—or die."

Those half-hundred Earthlings had

a chance, now. They didn't know it; but Doc Cantling, wise in pondering realities, and Karen might figure it out eventually.

The Watchers might send their Beast to steal the Earthlings one by one, but it would serve only to put the Earthlings on guard, make them suspicious and wary; they might remember Joe's words and watch Butch.

Man had plumbed mysteries before—sometimes almost too late. Perhaps they'd do it again. Perhaps? Perhaps, Hell! They'd solve it, and he'd do his best to help them by shutting his mind.

If the Watchers were worried about One, they wouldn't be apt to destroy the humans wholesale so long as One remained unheard, unseen and unsensed.

Controlling his mind carefully, Joe thought, *"The goblins got One. He is our hostage for safety."*

WHITE light burned brighter into his mind; Joe felt thoughts probing. Deliberately, he roused up visions of his dreams of childhood days when dragons, headless monsters, ghosts prowled through the corridors of his mind.

He dwelt particularly on the hydra monster his child's mind had created after a spider had drifted down on his hand while he was playing in the backyard. All the loathing that had made his skin crawl then he wove into that memory.

The white light dimmed.

"Are you Keeper of the Goblins?"

Before he could answer, the brightness vanished from his eyes. He opened them, gingerly looked about him.

At first he saw nothing which could have distracted the attention of the columns of color. Then a gurgling cry drew his eyes groundward. Butch. Crawling on his hands and knees, crawling toward those columns of white.

Butch kept crawling forward. The

white columns directed their light at the baby. -

Unexpectedly, the columns of light retreated.

One of the columns directed his rays at Banion. "*What is this strange creature? Its mind speaks of food, of sleep, of pain. There is no creative thinking, as there is in your mind. But there is a power there.*"

Mind-wary, Banion thought, "*He is the Keeper of the Goblins.*"

There was another sudden change of the columns' interest.

"Butch! Where are you, you little devil?" Astonished, Joe swung about to see Jane Wilson, Butch's foster-mother, was moving toward him and the columns, her piquant face anxious as she glanced about seeking Butch.

Then she looked up, saw Joe and the pillars of light. Her piquant face drained of color as she spotted Butch crawling toward the columns. "Butch," she screamed. "Stop!" Then she was running desperately toward the creeping baby.

Banion saw the columns swell larger and brighter as the running girl approached. They swelled and swelled until they were almost touching. Desperately, Banion flung himself toward the running Jane.

But before he touched her, the concentrated light struck at her. Even though he was out of the concentration of light, Joe felt searing heat blister his skin.

The smell of burning flesh seared at his nostrils; he stared down at the burned, blackened remains of Jane Wilson.

Jim, Tom, Big John, Mrs. Larson—now Big John's beloved, Jane. The Watchers' list was growing.

THE HORROR and hate welled up into Banion's mind.

"Damn you, Watchers!" He swung to face the columns of light, and hot anger was purging his mind, cleansing it, welding it into a clean, sharp sword that sought an answer to these Watch-

ers, who were the Earthlings only barrier to rebirth.

The sharp, clear sword sought the answer—and found it!

"Damn you, Watchers!" Banion hoarsed. "I'll tell you where One is." He swept his hand at the crawling Butch. "He's there in that crawling baby's mind, locked there, cut off from you, imprisoned in material..."

Butch stopped crawling, turned to look at Banion's wide-legged figure. The baby's blue eyes fixed upon Joe's hazel ones.

Butch started crawling toward Joe. Banion waited, eyes locked with the baby's blue ones.

"You are right," came the thought. "I'm trapped in this mind."

New thoughts probed into Banion's mind. "One! It is you! What has happened?"

The thought was bitter. "I made a mistake. I thought that by entering this mind, because it did not resist me, I could slay the invaders one by one.

"At first it was easy, but then I found my power waning; I could draw the Beasts but I could not direct them.

"Then I attempted to escape but could not. This plastic mind, fresh with only atavistic memories when I entered, became less plastic as it drew upon the sights, sounds, smells. It began to change, to mature; and with it I have been changing too."

"I, One, who gloried in the sheer beauty of untrammelled thought, am finding that I am now selfishly interested in keeping this belly filled, this body free from pain."

"But, One," thought from the white columns passed through Banion's mind, "death of the little creature would free you."

"No!" the thought was desperate. "My ego is intertwined with his; if his consciousness dies, so will mine.

He must be kept safe if I stay alive. We must accept these invaders

from a faroff star; we must live in peace with them."

"Why?" a new thought surged through Banion's mind from the columns of white. "Sacrifice yourself, One; we will kill the baby. You will die, but then we can purge our world of these invaders."

One's thought was sardonic. "Have you forgotten? When I die, you die, for we are One."

There was a thought silence.

Quietly then, "Aye, we are One. Without you the chain of entities would be broken. So long as you live, even though imprisoned without that invader's body, your life-force completes the cycle."

BANION'S mind was numb with shock. He had glimpsed only a part of the answer. The tables had turned with such a suddenness, he couldn't quite grasp the change.

Then...

"Stranger, we ask as a favor. There will be times when we wish to talk to One, while this embryo is growing. May we use your mind to talk to him? We cannot reach him otherwise; One is submerged by the mind of the body he inhabits."

A favor? A favor in return for undisputed rule over this miniature

Earth? He had but one answer: "Yes." "Thank you."

The white columns dimmed in intensity, resumed their rainbow-colors; there was the weird music and the Watchers was gone.

Joe walked quietly to where Butch stretched his arms up to him. Gently he picked up the baby, set him on one shoulder.

He strode to where the blackened body of Jane Wilson lay. He stood there quietly for a moment. "We'll bury you beside Big John," he promised, "and we'll raise a column of marble to mark your resting-place."

Slowly then, he turned, retraced his way toward the cleft in the cliff.

Joe was only a short distance down the sloping trail when he heard the voices of the Earthlings below him. Once again, he was returning to his people, bearing sorrow. But this time, he could tell them the truth and speak of their destiny.

He stopped, waited.

The long line of Earthlings came around a slight bend in the trail. For a moment, they didn't see him; they were looking up and beyond him toward the heavens.

Up and beyond to the heavens.

Which was as it should be.



Remembered Words

Your Selections
From Our May Issue

The response to our call for votes on best-received letters is proof enough that you seem to approve the plan of offering originals to those who write such letters. Thus, the way we shall work the prizes will be like this:

The 1st-place winner will please select the original from the May issue that he'd like to own, and same will be sent to him, without delay.

The 2nd-place winner should list two originals, since one of his selections may have been picked by the first-place winner.

The 3rd-place winner, should list three originals, in case either, or both, of his first two choices have been taken by the preceding winners.

We'll be waiting to hear from Vic Waldrop, Jr; Andre Von Bell, and Jay N. Edelson, USNR.

THE MOUNTAIN OF LIGHT

An Article On The Pseudo-Sciences
Of Yesterday And Today

By L. Sprague de Camp

THE EXPLORATION and settlement of North America by Europeans generated much the same crop of enticing rumors, glamorous legends, and screwball theories about the land and its people as characterized the other continents.

For instance there was the Strait of Anian, which haunted maps of North America roughly from 1560 to 1793. This strait was usually shown as extending northeast from the west coast of Canada and opening into the Arctic Ocean just west of Hudson's Bay, thus cutting off Alaska and what is now Yukon Territory from the rest of the continent. In fact, during this period several sea-captains claimed to have sailed through the Strait of Anian—in spite of the fact that it never existed. The stories of its existence were not stopped until, in the 1790's, the British navigator George Vancouver—a former companion of Captain Cook—gave the whole cast from Washington to the Aleutians a complete treatment, and established once and for all that there was no easy natural passage through the American rampart.

Then there are the many theories

of the origin of the American Indians. A whole library of books has been written to prove that the New World indigenes—or at least certain tribes of them—are of Polynesian, Jewish, Phoenician, Negro, Welsh, Norse, Atlantean, or Lemurian origin. Some pious early settlers even evolved the convenient theory that the "Indians" were not real men at all, but a sort of pseudo-men or androids that the Devil had created for his own sinful purposes. If such were the case, one need not worry about how they could have been descended from Adam. Furthermore, this theory comforted those whose consciences had been bothered by the manner in which Europeans had been robbing and massacring the aborigines. Children of the Devil were fair game.

All this despite the fact that there is no mystery whatever about the origin of the Amerinds and hasn't been for centuries. Back in the seventeenth century, Sir Paul Rycaut—a scholarly Englishman who translated one of the Spanish histories of the Peruvian Conquest—guessed the answer: that the Amerinds came from what he called "Tartary", that is, eastern and cen-

tral Asia. And now there is no scientific doubt whatever that they came over from Siberia via Bering Strait in a long trickle of migrations beginning 10,000 or more years ago.

But perhaps the most outre of these odd ideas is one that originated comparatively recently, and is still flourishing in a subterranean sort of way. I refer to the legend of Mount Shasta, the second tallest peak in the United States, rising to over 14,000 feet in Siskiyou County at the northern end of California. The story is not only enlightening in itself; it also brings in some of the creepiest characters in the whole horrid history of American occultism and pseudo-science.

Every now and then, somebody brings up the question of the legends having to do with Lemurians in long white nightgowns performing mystic rites on the mountain. A couple of years ago Joseph Henry Jackson inquired in his book column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about:

...the persistent legend that the high reaches of Mt. Shasta are inhabited to this day by a band of shamans dating back to the time of the submersion of the lost continent of Mu; that tale keeps cropping up, and it's astonishing to find the people who want to believe it.

The answer is as follows: In 1894, a writer on the occult named Frederick Spencer Oliver (not to be confused with his contemporary, the novelist Frederick Scott Oliver) published a novel called *A Dweller on Two Planets* by "Phylos the Tibetan". "Phylos" is not a Tibetan-sounding name, but never mind.

The story tells how the narrator, in wandering about Mount Shasta (then a considerably wilder place and a more plausible site for arcane mysteries) came across a saintly Chinese named Quong. The narrator says that he shared with many Californians of the time a virulent anti-Chinese prejudice, looking upon the Celestials as a benighted, degenerate, and incorrigi-

bly sinful race. Quong, however, cured the narrator of this fixation, and also demonstrated supernatural powers by taming bears and pumas by merely speaking to them—as St. Francis is alleged to have done with a wolf.

It transpires that Quong is no mere coolie, but one of the Masters of a group of magi, who preserve the wisdom of the ages in their headquarters on Mount Shasta. These supermen induct the narrator into their brotherhood and take him on a grand tour of the planet Venus in his spiritual body—hence the title of the book. They also teach him to remember his former incarnations. In one of these he was Phylos (whence the pseudonym) and in another Prince Zailm Numinos of Atlantis.

Oliver's Atlantis is one of the super-scientific kind, with airplanes and television. Its proper name is Poseid and its chief cities are Idosa, Terna, Marzeus, Corosa, Numea, and Caiphul. The Rai or emperor is elected by an aristocracy of priests (*Incala*) and scientists (*Xioqua*). — I don't know how to pronounce the initial X either. — By hard work and native talent Zailm rises from a poor miner's son to one of the lords of the realm—but then he is undone by women, as better men have been. He tries to keep both a wife and a mistress at the same time, with the same fatal results that have attended this experiment so often since.

Unfortunately—well, over fifty novels on the lost-continent theme have been published in book form good, bad, and indifferent, and this story, though fairly important, in the history of American cults and pseudo-science, is one of the most tedious, tiresome, and tyronic of the whole lot.

For thirty-five years nobody paid much attention to Oliver's novel, until, around 1930, several persons interested in the occult all began making use of it at once. Until that time

one can hardly say that there was a "Mount Shasta legend"—as one badly-written fantasy-novel hardly constitutes a tradition in itself. In the meantime, the American underground occult tradition had swallowed the concept, developed by a line of pseudoscientists such as Newbrough and Churchward, of a second lost continent (Atlantis being the first) in the Pacific Ocean, called variously Lemuria, Pan, or Mu.

The most singular use to which Mount Shasta was put was its incorporation into the grotesque mythology of the "I AM" movement of the Ballards. Ballardism may be described as a caricature of Theosophy, and as Theosophy itself has been authoritatively defined as "a caricature of Eastern thought and Western science" (K. T. Behanan, *Yoga: A Scientific Evaluation*, p. 165.) you may get some idea of Ballardism

THE LATE Guy Warren Ballard, alias Godfre Ray King, was a long thin, fanciful, histrionic person born in Kansas in 1878; he spent many years as a Spiritualism medium. His wife, Edna Wheeler Ballard—alias Lotus Ray King—got her start as a vaudeville performer and a clerk in an occult-book shop. During the 1920's, Ballard sold stock in imaginary gold mines and oil wells to old ladies, preferably blind or deaf; one of his better coups was getting her last \$100 from a prospect in her eighties. For these accomplishments, he was indicted in Chicago in 1929 and skipped town until the indictments were *nolle prossed*.

Ballard got the idea for his cult from his friend, William Dudley Pelley, organizer of the fascistic Silver Shirts. The Ballards set up their "I AM" on lines similar to those of Pelley's gang, without Pelley's anti-Semi-

tism, but with storm-troopers called "Minute Men of Saint Germain"; they adopted as their Mahatma the slippery eighteenth-century occultist and industrial promoter, the Comte de Saint-Germain. In their churches they had two pictures on the wall—one of Jesus, with the long-haired, bearded, blond, effeminate beauty which Anglo-American artists (probably erroneously) attribute to him*; the other of a gimlet-eyed, bearded, white-robed character identified as "Saint Germain" but as different as possible from the elegant, if unreliable Comte, who was clean-shaven and usually wore a black velvet suit with the knee-pants of his time.

According to the doctrines of this cult, Saint Germain is one of a hierarchy of Ascended Masters, of whom the Ballards were the Accredited Messengers. In his *Unveiled Mysteries* Ballard told (or rather cribbed from Oliver) how—while wandering Mount Shasta on "government business"—he had met Saint Germain and had been taken on a series of tours of the world and through past ages. He explored lost civilizations in the Sahara Desert, and at the bottom of the Amazon, and saw himself and Edna as they were in former incarnations. In ancient Egypt, for instance, they had been a priest and a Vestal Virgin (*sic!*) respectively. At one rendezvous, Saint Germain converted a "panther" to vegetarianism, just as Oliver's Quong had done. One wonders how long it took these poor carnivores to starve to death on a grass diet, for which their teeth and stomachs were totally unsuited!

Saint Germain also showed off the Masters' underground headquarters in the Teton Mountains, full of gold and jewels in vast profusion, and equipped with a magical motion-picture projector to exhibit the histories of all nations. Ballard was delighted to learn

*While there is no historical evidence of the appearance of Jesus, it is likely from several considerations that he was a small, dark, clean-shaven, short-haired man. The conventional modern pictures of him all go back to a self-portrait by Albrecht Durer.

that he, Mrs. Ballard, and their sons were reincarnations respectively of George Washington, Joan of Arc, and the Marquis de Lafayette.

OTHER ELEMENTS of his psychopathic doctrine Ballard borrowed without credit from Theosophy, Christian Science, Rosicrucianism, and the Swamis who comprise one of the more picturesque elements of the fauna of California. The Ballards went to extraordinary lengths to keep their flock under iron control and to deprive them of any competing outlets for their affections. Members were mercilessly milked of their money, denied all sexual relations, compelled to kill all pets down to the last puppy, and urged to destroy antiques on the ground that these harbored "Entities" (evil spirits). The Ballards terrified their dupes with talk of "Black Magicians" against whom they were forever campaigning with "Decrees" and with "Saint Germain's Blue Ray". Saint Germain hated red and black because these were the colors of Communism and the Black Magicians respectively. Consequently the "I AM" publications were printed in purple ink, and the Ballards promised that when they ruled the United States they would replace the red in the American flag by gold.

In order to attain this dictatorship, the Ballards began, in private meetings in 1937, to try to hex President and Mrs. Roosevelt out of existence, so that the Accredited Messengers could take over the government. However, the Roosevelts proved impervious to their spells and Ballard himself "ascended" of heart-disease in 1939.

The energetic Mrs. Ballard and her son carried on, in Los Angeles, until the next year, where they were indicted for mail fraud, having promised all sorts of cures and miracles and then not having delivered. During the trial Mrs. Ballard took exception to the presence of a photographer and

cried: "There's a scorpion in this room!" whereupon the Ballardites chanted "Scorpy! Scorpy! Scorpy!"

The accused were convicted but on a second appeal, on a technicality, (The point was the exclusion of women from the jury, contrary to California usage.) the Supreme Court reversed the case, and at last accounts the cult was still carrying on in more subdued fashion in Santa Fe.

At the same time that Ballard was launching his cult, Wishar S. Cerve's *Lemuria, the Lost Continent of the Pacific* (1931) was published by the Rosicrucians (AMORC) of San Jose, California. Cerve neatly combined two pseudo-scientific opinions by asserting that the Mayas were the descendants of Atlanteans and Lemurians, while all the other Amerinds were sprung from the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. He also dropped dark hints of mysterious inscriptions at Klamath Falls and unaccountable lights at night and other prodigies around Mount Shasta, which was revealed as being infested by diffident long-haired persons of angelic aspect, speaking with English accents. There were also boat-shaped aircraft buzzing around the mountain and rumors of mystic rites. Lemurians!

Well, one good hoax deserves another, and in 1932 the Shasta legend reached definitive form in a feature story in the *Los Angeles Times*, a sheet normally distinguished for its zealous political and economic conservation. One Edward Lanser wrote of how, when he had been riding on the Shasta Limited enroute to Portland, the train wound around Mount Shasta and:

Gazing upon its splendor, I suddenly perceived that the whole southern side of the mountain was ablaze with a strange reddish green light. A flame of light that grew faint, then flared up with renewed brilliance.

My first conjecture was a forest fire, but the total absence of smoke discounted that theory. The light resembled the glow of Roman candles.

Then the rising sun dimmed the color of the scene, and gradually, as the train

crept north, the weird phenomenon was lost to view. The thing intrigued me; yet I felt unable to discuss what I had seen with anyone... Convinced that I had not been the victim of a mirage, I later asked the conductor about the mysterious pyrotechnics. His answer was short but enticing.

"Lemurians," he said. "They hold ceremonies up there."

Lemurians!

The fact that a group of people conduct ceremonies on the side of a mountain is not of exceptional interest, but when these people are said to be Lemurians, that is startling, for the continent of Lemuria, like the lost Atlantis, disappeared beneath the ocean ages ago, and the Lemurians have long since been known as an extinct race.

EAGER TO learn, Lancer inquired round about the Shasta region and discovered that:

...the existence of a "mystic village" on Mt. Shasta was an accepted fact. Business men, amateur explorers, officials, and ranchers in the country surrounding Shasta spoke freely of the community, and all attested to the weird rituals that are performed on the mountainside after sunset, midnight and sunrise. Also, they freely ridiculed my avowed trek into the sacred precincts, assuring me that an entrance was as difficult and forbidden as an entrance into Tibet.

It appeared that although the existence of these last descendants of the ancient Lemurians have been known to Northern Californians for more than fifty years, only four or five explorers have penetrated the invisible protective boundary of this Lemurian settlement; but no one has ever returned to tell the tale...

Just then I learned that the existence of Lemurian descendants on Mt. Shasta was vouched for some years ago by no less an authority than the eminent scientist, Prof. Edgar Lucien Larkin, for many years director of the Mt. Lowe Observatory in Southern California.

Prof. Larkin, with determined sagacity, penetrated the Shasta wilderness as far as he could—or dared—and then, cleverly, continued his investigations from a promontory with a powerful long-distance telescope.

What the scientist saw, he reported, was a great temple in the heart of the mystic village—a marvelous work of carved marble and onyx, rivalling in beauty and architectural splendor the magnificence of the temples of Yucatan. He saw a village housing from 600 to 1000 people; they appeared to be industriously engaged in the manufacture of articles necessary to their consumption, they were engaged in farming the sunny slopes and glens surrounding the village—with miraculous re-

sults, judging from the astounding vegetation revealed to Prof. Larkin's spy-glass. He found them to be a peaceful community evidently contented to live as their ancient forebears lived before Lemuria was swallowed up by the sea.

In their nightly ceremonies (Lanser continued) the Lemurians celebrated their escape from Lemuria to "Gautama", (This is of course the name of the founder of Buddhism.) as they call America. From time to time they enter the neighboring towns, "tall, barefoot, noble-looking men, with close-cropped hair, dressed in spotless white robes" to buy lard, sulphur, and salt with nuggets of gold. They also contribute generously of these nuggets to worthy causes like the Red Cross, though they seem never to have learned English.

THE REALLY incredible thing is that these staunch descendants of that vanished race have succeeded in secluding themselves in the midst of our teeming State, and that they have managed through, some marvelous sorcery, to keep highways, hot-dog establishments, filling stations and the other ugly counterparts of our tourist system out of their sacred precincts.

A story not without a certain fey charm, and it is almost too bad that there is not a word of truth in it. Most of Mount Shasta is a state preserve and public camping ground, and campers and state forest officials roam freely over Shasta all the time without meeting Lemurians, in nightgowns or otherwise. Any reader may go camp there himself to see. There is no "Shasta legend" current in Siskiyou County. Miss Edith Mirrieles, editor of *The Pacific Spectator* and a person of long experience, wide acquaintance, and profound sagacity, who grew up in sight of Shasta, assures me that the people who actually live in that region never heard of such a thing,

And far from being an "eminent scientist", Larkin was just an elderly occultist who until his death in 1924 ran the Mount Lowe Observatory near

Los Angeles. You have no doubt heard of the Mount Wilson Observatory (now run in conjunction with the Mount Palomar Observatory) and have a vague picture of Larkin twirling the knobs of the hundred-inch telescope and peering at distant galaxies.

But the Mount Lowe Observatory had nothing whatever to do with the great scientific institution of Mounts Wilson and Palomar. It was a tourist attraction operated by the Pacific Electric Railway in conjunction with its Mount Lowe Inn, reached by a steep and winding ride on the railroad's electric interurban cars from

Los Angeles. Larkin (and later his son) showed the hotel's guests the stars through a small telescope until in the 1930's, the telescope mechanism broke down and the inn burned, so that the installation was abandoned.

The whole story is evidently just an imaginative expansion upon the hints dropped by Cerve in his book, with perhaps assistance from something written by Larkin, who was the author of a book on occultism called *The Matchless Alter (sic) of the Soul*. The motto would seem to be the French *l'audace, toujours l'audace*.

Or, to give an English paraphrase, "Enough gall will get you a fast buck."



WELCOME

By Alfred Coppel

A Vignette of Tomorrow

THE CITY awoke and looked at the sky.

The waters of the canal—deep and still—rippled, and the shattered minaretttes reflected there did a macabre dance as awareness returned. The sentient screens, feeble with age, revolved with a searching, painful deliberation; they were the first mechanical movement in the city for millenia.

The restless wind—thin and cold—blew, as it always had, in from the red-silted bottom of the long-dry sea.

Sand drifted in the ruined streets; cold rime still patterned the broken windowpanes, unconscious of the feeble touch of the faraway sun.

The city was in ruins. A slain city, with its ancient murder half-hidden by the mouldering touch of endless centuries. The remnants of fey flying butresses lay in the streets; the riparian esplanade, torn and sundered into rubble, drank of the black canal water.

The wind whispered to the water, and the water to the sky. The screens,

turning questioningly on their frictionless bearings, breathed life into the corpse of the city.

The city awoke and was afraid.

A relay clicked once and dissolved into dust, but the impulse born in the instant of destruction soared into the blue air, fanning out across breathless miles with the speed of sunlight. Higher and higher, out of the cobalt day into the void. It touched metal and fled back—back to the city, shrieking with electronic terror. The screens caught it, and a wheel turned deep under the bomb-gutted city.

A vat of mercury rippled; an electron tube glowed, and a brain calculated. Far above, machinery creaked and a bronze door shifted and crumbled under tons of shifting sand. One winged craft survived the rain of silt from above; it rolled down a ramp into a cradle.

Fear beat through the city, like a pulse—fear and ancient hatred. A pointer swung rustily through a half arc. The winged thing in the cradle slipped into the bowels of the city, through lead valves.

Cadmium bars slid free of their tunnels in a glowing hive. The winged thing's mouth opened greedily on green and pitted hinges; it sucked hungrily at the death within the leaden furnace. Charged with vengeance, the winged thing climbed along a conveyor that dissolved into rust as its work was done.

The electronic brain whispered to the tiny brain of the winged thing. It whispered of war and danger and death and sun fires in the ancient streets.

A sighing valve opened in darkness. The cradle laid the winged thing in its



tube. Gears, shattered by time, but still able, pointed the tube at the sky.

The winged thing sprang forth into the blue air, fire behind and death in its teeth, the last defense of a millenia-old war...

"There. Did you see it? From that dark patch on the very edge of the Lake of the Sun."

"A streak of flame, wasn't it? Like—"

"Like a rocket-trail."

"Impossible."

"But why? We must be within detection range now. And if—mind you I say if—there should actually be life on Mars... that's nonsense, I know... but couldn't it be someone coming out to us? After all, this is the first attempt to reach Mars. Wouldn't there be some sort of—well, welcome?"



*If you do not save your copies of science-fiction magazines, send them to the Fan-Vets, c/o James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing 54, New York, for free distribution to men and women in the armed forces—
it'll mean a lot to some fan!*

She was running...
then she felt
something
catch
her.



ALIEN RESTORATION

by Charles Dye

As commander, Leaton was expendable — the obvious man to go out for the missing astrogator. And he went, wondering if he'd be the next to crack up. Then he saw his wife running toward him. Laura, who'd died back on Earth . . .

THE MORPHINE wasn't doing any good this time, she thought, feeling the pain slowly start to burn inside her again. They would have to give her a bigger shot next time—if there was a next time. Out of the corner of one eye she noticed that her arm and hand blended almost perfectly with the pale whiteness of the room. Then the pain inside her grew hotter and hotter. She tried to scream and couldn't. A nurse taking her pulse dropped her wrist and rushed to the door. "Get her husband—quick!" Well—that could mean only one thing, but it was almost worth it; anything was worth seeing Allen once more.

The men who ride star-ships will be looked on as "heroes" no doubt. But many of them won't feel the part. Most real "heroes" usually don't feel heroic at all!

Someone was holding her hand. She looked up. He was trying hard to smile. "Hi," she managed to whisper.

"Hi, yourself." Tears were in his eyes. "It doesn't hurt much anymore, does it?"

"No," she lied. Then smiling, "It's been fun, darling. The next time you're out here, give the Moon and stars my love... Sorry—I lost the fight..."

"Oh, Laura," he said almost choking. "I'm going to miss you—"

"Wonderful boy..." She tried to give his hand one last squeeze, but found she didn't have time. Her life was running out of her like water down a drain—

Blackness.

She wasn't aware of the bright orange flame that enveloped her body—

Or of the ashes being scattered over the sea, the original mother of all terrestrial life—

She wasn't aware of the long years of nothingness—

Or of being nothing—

Then suddenly she was aware!

Aware of running as if in a nightmare—running, running... Something caught her; she tore free, there she was running towards instead of away from something. The ground scraped harshly on her feet. They were bare; her body was bare.

Fear gripped her so tightly she thought she was going to be sick. Then her heart jumped into her throat—

Ahead of her in a clearing she saw—Allen!

"Laura!" he screamed seeing her. Then he fell and didn't move.

Oh, she thought, running towards him, *what if he's injured or dying?* She had to get help—but where?

Hysterically she found herself running through a crazy patch-work of

colors and grotesque landscaping that could only belong in a nightmare—her nightmare. Maybe if she kept running long enough, she would wake up all tangled in the bed clothes and find Allen trying to comfort her.

Before she realized it, she was under the shadow of a huge cliff honey-combed with caverns. With the shadow came the feeling that ground and sky were about to swallow her up. Exhausted, she crept into the entrance of the nearest cave—and stumbled over something on the floor. A hoarse snarl went echoing through the darkness. Wildly she felt around for something to use as a weapon. Her hand came in contact with a rock, just as a lunge was made for her midriff. She drew back the rock and felt it connect with a sickening crunch. Something heavy collapsed on top of her. Gasping for breath, she wiggled out from underneath and crawled towards the entrance.

Still clasping the rock, she sat down in the murky sunlight, utterly exhausted, listening to her heart pound and silently praying that she would soon wake up.

Then she remembered about having cancer and dying. "Oh," she sobbed, "where am I—Heaven or Hell?"

●

"**H**OW DID Danner get by the screening process?" Leaton's words cracked into their earphones like rifle shots.

The little knot of men beside the space-ship looked nervously at one another; they knew their commander's question was purely rhetorical. They also knew what he was thinking, because they were thinking the same thing: that possibly there might be others in their midst who were potential psychos. Unless a miracle happened, the expedition appeared to

be doomed. But it would be doubly doomed if another of their specialized personnel cracked up and disappeared. Danner had been the astrogator, and without him they might have to search through the entire galactic haystack before finding Earth.

Reeves, second in command and expedition psychologist, started to say something, but changed his mind. Through the headpiece of his space suit the rest of the men watched tiny beads of perspiration pop out over his face.

Leaton looked straight at him. "Well—"

"Somebody back on Earth made a slip—a bad slip! Danner should never have been given positive screening papers." Reeves didn't try to conceal the quaver of apprehension in his voice. "Perhaps if Danner can be found soon enough—"

"There's a possibility you can shock-talk him back to reality," Leaton finished for him. "We've been on this planet exactly four hours installing new drive tubes for the long push home. Among us, who has had time to analyze, observe, or sample anything outside of the air? We know nothing about this world except that the atmosphere has a low oxygen content."

Reeves shrugged his shoulders. The rest of the men stared first at Reeves, then at their commander.

Leaton gazed up over the men and the ship into the dirty yellow haze of daylight filtering through clouds the color of mud. *I know what you're thinking*, he thought, glancing down at Reeves. *The morale is sinking every minute and will sink even lower if someone doesn't volunteer to look for Danner. Why not me? You're thinking. My job of commanding and directing the mapping of the Trans-Galactic Rim is finished. Why not me? Every other man is needed to get the Explorer back to Earth.*

Leaton was aware of Reeves and the others staring at him and waiting—

"All right, I'll try and find Danner." The steadiness of his voice surprised him. "If I'm not back within forty-eight hours, don't come looking for me."

He knew they wouldn't anyway.

●
LATER THAT same day, with portable radar set, supplies and rifle on his back, Leaton paused on the rim of the valley in which the men were still working on the new tubes of the *Explorer*. He liked the men—even Reeves. They knew what had to be done and did it—but so did he. He was out here about to plunge into the unknown, wasn't he? Hero stuff—but there was a lump in his throat; he turned and walked down into the yellow and purple silences of a landscape thousands of light-years away from anything familiar or comforting.

For an hour or more, he walked around the valley, stopping every hundred yards to check the radar. Nothing but rocks, trees and brush appeared on the scope—nothing remotely resembling a man.

Finally he plunged into a dim purple colonnade of trees and shrubbery leading off into the terrain of jungle surrounding the valley. Except for the drowsy hum of insects flitting around his headpiece and the occasional crash of something larger in the brush, all was silence.

More hours passed as he went farther and farther into the dismal tunnel of silence and insects. Although he had spotted no tracks, there was a good chance Danner had come this way. He had glimpsed no other penetrable openings in the jungle circling the valley.

Eventually the colonnade became streaked with a muddy yellow light that grew brighter and brighter until he found himself stepping out into murky sunlight illuminating a night-marish plain of tumbled rock, eroded soil and twisted trees colored a sick-

ly yellow and purple. The grotesqueness of the scene terrified him for a moment; unconsciously he lowered the rifle to the crook of his arm.

By the time fear had subsided, and he had made several more radar scans and examined the vicinity of the tunnel exit, night was falling. Overhead, muddy clouds turned to deep emerald as a heavy green twilight settled over the surrealistic landscape of purple and yellow. He sat down and tried to eat something, but the crazy color-scheme had taken his appetite away. He got up and carefully checked his space suit, then climbed the biggest mound of rocks he could find and tried to compose himself for sleep.

Night seemed to fall with a silent crash. Not a glimmer of light or luminescence penetrated the inky blackness anywhere. He made himself as comfortable as he could, but lying there in his space suit was more like lying in a full length straight jacket.

Icy waves of loneliness flooded through him, dissolving whatever courage or aggressiveness he might have possessed earlier in the day. But he really wasn't out here alone, he told himself; he had company. Danner was also someplace out here.

He had to find Danner.

He repeated the thought over and over. He mustn't weaken or forget.

LATER IT began to rain. First softly, then heavily. It was a very Earthlike rain and with it his thoughts weaved back through three long years of voyage, back to home. But all he could think of or remember was his wife; she had died of cancer exactly one week before the discovery of the U-235 derivative that would permanently cure the disease.

All these light-years and all the perilous activity of the last thirty-six months had done nothing, after all, to fill the lonely emptiness of his embittered being. Why go on? He had been kidding himself—nothing really

mattered anymore. Then he thought of the others back at the ship. *He had to find Danner.* Nevertheless, visions of her lovely face and body drifted through his consciousness until he finally sank into sleep.

He opened his eyes to a dirty straw-colored dawn. The rain had stopped. His mouth tasted as though someone had slept in it all night. Snapping back the headpiece, he washed his mouth out with water from the canteen, then, for a moment, breathed in the thin morning air. With the oxygen content equivalent to that of 16,000 feet Earth altitude, it was like breathing mountain air. He decided to leave the headpiece open for awhile.

Popping several protein and dextrose capsules into his mouth, he gathered up his gear and started climbing down the rocks. Near the bottom, he happened to glance up. Coming towards him was a nude woman—

"Laura!" he screamed.

Forgetting where he was, he took a step into space and fell crashing to the ground.

After coming to, it was a long time before he could remember what had happened. Or had it happened? Had he gone psycho, too? His head seemed stuffed with cotton—not enough oxygen. The headpiece lay smashed by his side, but the soft hiss inside the collar of his suit told him his oxygen supply was still intact.

Sluggishly he searched through his pack until he found an emergency oxygen tube. Clamping one end to the nozzle inside the suit, he stuck the other in his mouth, breathing deeply for several minutes. Slowly his head began to clear. Then he discovered that the radar set was smashed.

He got to his feet and walked aimlessly around, trying to formulate some plan of search. Occasionally he would stop and shout Danner's name,

but nothing answered except the hollow echo of his own voice.

Suddenly he stopped.

Before him, leading off into the landscape, was a set of footprints. But why had Danner taken off his shoes? He looked more closely at the prints. Yes, there was the faint outline of toe marks in each print.

Forgetting all else, he concentrated on following the tracks.

Hours passed. He lost all sense of direction and time.

Then, quite abruptly, the sunlight was cut off, and he found himself in deep shadow. Glancing up, he saw that he was standing at the base of a huge cliff of rock. At the same moment, out of the corner of one eye, he caught sight of something else—

She was standing in front of the mouth of a cavern. Sweat broke out over his face. *It was his wife again.*

"Laura!" Only this time, when he shouted her name, he didn't fall down and lose consciousness.

"Oh, Allen!" she cried, stumbling towards him.

His brain began spinning madly like a top. "B-but what are you doing here? You're supposed to be dead!"

"Oh, darling, what a time to ask questions. We're together! For the moment, what else matters?"

"Nothing," he heard himself saying as he rushed towards her with open arms.

Laughing, she stepped forward to meet his embrace. He didn't see the rock clutched in her hand, nor did he see her raise it high over her head. He was only aware of her hot panting breath and kisses—

Then darkness.

MUCH LATER, a thin thread of shining silver began weaving back and forth across his subconscious. Gradually he became aware of words forming and dissolving—

While you were asleep last night, I went inside your brain to learn if

you were like the other—the unstable one you call Danner. Unfortunately, I can only contact you when you are unconscious—hence, the necessity of putting you in your present state.

A dreamlike awareness almost bordering on consciousness settled over Leaton. Through his subconscious flashed a myriad of questions and terrors. But the sentient thread of silver paid no attention, continuing to weave its shiny self through his brain.

Eons before your section of the galaxy came into being, I was accidentally marooned alone on this planet. I am of a race of energy creatures too complex to describe to you. It was our custom to roam the universe in search of biological life-forms most attractive to us as individuals. When such a form was found, the individual would metamorphose into either the male or female of the species, shortly afterwards, losing all our original identity and powers. In the beginning, we came from outside time and space, from another dimension. Not many got through. I am probably the last of my number to make the change. In getting through the crack separating your physical universe from ours, my powers of locomotion were damaged and I have been here ever since, waiting for a suitable life-form to appear. We are immortal. Our purpose in this universe was to give other races immortality. Your wife you now have back—without cancer. She is not an imitation, she is Laura. Your children will be immortal until they will themselves to die. And some day, when the main stream of humanity comes in contact with the strain created here, eventually all will be immortal.

Leaton felt apprehension flood through him like a wave. "Why do you say *here*? Do you mean we have to live on this nightmare forever?"

As I mentioned, my locomotive powers were damaged in entering your universe. Again it is impossible to explain... if she leaves this planet, the gravity change will cause a breakdown in the energy-organic metamor-

phosis that destroyed me and created her. The chemical structure of this world is not inimical to your metabolism, and you will eventually become acclimated to the oxygen deficiency.

"If you are destroyed, how is it you forced her to hit me with the rock?"

Until her organic pattern completely sets, I will have awareness and some control over her. However, the pattern is setting faster than I had anticipated. By the time you regain consciousness, I shall be no more. Goodbye—

"Wait! How do I know my brain hasn't been tampered with?"

You don't. But outside of having been picked, your brain has been touched in no way. I understand the obligation to your expedition—but there is now your wife. The decision is up to you. Danner is—is...the pattern has—

Abrupt blackness. The silver thread was gone.

●
HAD IT been a dream?

Slowly he became aware of a sobbing somewhere...and a hand running softly through his hair...

But had it been a dream?

He could remember every word of the entity, as though they had been burned into his brain. For the sake of sanity he *had* to believe. There was no other explanation for—Laura. But how was he going to explain it all to her? As the entity had explained it to him? Probably. He had better wait, though—wait until he either found Danner or until he had given the men back at the ship some explanation as to why he wouldn't be leaving with them.

He was almost afraid to open his eyes. But the pain was diminishing from his head and with it, the fear that he was losing his mind. He suddenly opened his eyes and found them gazing into hers.

With a cry she bent down and

hungrily kissed him on the mouth, then pressed her face hard against his. He could feel the wetness of her tear-streaked cheek.

"Don't talk, darling." Her voice was soft and warm. "I don't know what made me hit you...everything's so strange..." Quietly she told him all that had happened up to the time of stumbling over and hitting something that had made a grab for her.

That must have been Danner, Leaton thought. Taking her face between his hands he kissed her. "Let's have a look at this *something*."

They both got up and Leaton took a hypogun from his pack containing a drug which blocked out all neural impulses except those necessary to sustain life. He also grabbed a flashlight and stuck his oxygen tube back in his mouth, although he was already noticing the adjustment of his metabolism to the oxygen deficiency.

Further back in the cave his light picked up the prone form of someone lying on the floor. It was Danner. His oxygen tube somehow had managed to remain intact in his mouth, but there was a lump the size of a golf ball on his forehead.

Laura gave a gasp when she saw it was a man. "Who is it?" she whispered.

Danner was breathing fitfully, and, as the light played over him, his eyelids flickered and opened. But before anything could happen, Leaton shot a pellet from the hypogun into his neck artery. Slowly he relaxed and his breathing became more regular.

Leaton turned to his wife. "I've got to explain something to you, Laura. Let's go out into the sunlight."

He noticed that as she blinked at the sudden brightness of the light, tears also spilled from her eyes. She suddenly clung to him, shoulders shaking and voice sobbing.

"I know, darling," he said. "It's pretty terrifying...it must seem as though we're dead and in some sort of Hell somewhere. Well, we *are* somewhere, but it's not Hell—al-

though we'll have to stay here the rest of our lives, you and I. It's going to be awfully hard at first. We'll be starting from scratch, like Adam and Eve; only this time, not in any Eden."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were dry now, and she smiled. "Well, at least we won't have to worry about being kicked out of any place by somebody with a flaming sword." Her face started to cloud again—"But I don't understand—"

"About anything," he finished for her. "It's a long unbelievable story, which I can't explain to you now because I have to do something—I have to go away for awhile—"

"Without me!" Again there was terror in her voice.

As best he could, he explained about Danner, the expedition and why he, as commander, had to take Danner back.

"Of course you're right," she said after a long silence. The others probably have wives waiting for them, too. I'll be waiting for you with all fingers and toes crossed until you come back."

Then she kissed him so hard he saw stars.

LEATON made the trip back to the *Explorer* without incident. The sun was starting to set as he and Danner walked over the valley's rim and into the sight of several men lounging in front of the air-lock. With a shout that brought the others tumbling out of the ship, they rushed up the slope greeting and congratulating him, and finally, almost tearing both his arms off in the process. Most of them had given up wearing their head-pieces, and it was awfully good to hear their voices again.

Inside the ship, after things had quieted down, Reeves shook his hand and said, "Thanks, Leaton." Then he laughed nervously, trying to cover up the emotional tremble in his voice.

Then more soberly, "I'll get right to work on Danner."

For the moment, Leaton decided to say nothing of his own plans. There was too much activity and preparation for the blast-off tomorrow morning.

Quickly he walked down two levels and entered his own quarters, a small cubicle in the aft end of the ship containing his personal supplies, locker and bunk. From beneath the bunk he pulled out a large duffle bag and filled it with his personal belongings. Then he walked across the corridor to the supply room and began cramming his share of the food concentrates, electron charges for his rifle, and clothing into the bag. He jammed in a parachute on top of everything else. The metallic cloth from that, he thought, would come in handy for a thousand and one things, even clothing.

Back at the air-lock, duffle bag in hand, he summoned Reeves and explained that he didn't intend returning to Earth. "You're in full command, Reeves. Say goodbye to the men for—"

"Are you insane!" Reeves almost shrieked.

"You would think so if I tried to explain why I'm staying," Leaton said as he turned towards the air-lock.

"Grab him!" Reeves shouted to several men working nearby. "He's gone psycho!"

God! thought Leaton, fumbling with the lock mechanism, *they are going to try to take me back to Earth!* He hadn't considered that possibility.

The lock flew open with a hiss and he tried to jump through, but the heavy duffle bag knocked against his legs, throwing him off balance. He missed the top step of the landing stairs and fell headlong to the ground.

WHEN HE came to, he found himself lying on his bunk with his head pounding like a trip-hammer. For

a moment, he couldn't remember what had happened. Then it all came flooding back, and he almost screamed!

He jumped up and stumbled over his duffle bag, almost breaking his neck. Foggily he picked himself up off the deck and flicked the catch on his door. It wouldn't open. It took him several minutes of pushing and kicking to realize someone had locked him in from the outside.

He reached over and switched on the intercom. "Reeves!" he shouted. "Listen, Reeves—I've discovered my wife on this planet! That's why you've got to let me stay. She's the only woman here—she can't leave—and I can't leave her all alone!"

"Calm down, Leaton!" Reeves said. Then in an aside to someone else, "That fall on his head must have knocked him silly.

"Leaton," Reeves continued, "I can't talk to you now. I've got my hands full with Danner. Sorry about having to keep you prisoner— Just as soon as we hit deep space I'll go to work on you." Reeves clicked off his end and there was silence.

Waves of despair flooded through Leaton. He collapsed on his bunk, sobs shaking his shoulders at the thought of Laura.

Minutes slipped into hours.

He was quiet now, but he felt as though he were going to die any second. There was no way out. He couldn't blast down the door. There were other doors, not to mention men and Reeves, and it was impossible to break through the air-lock.

Maybe Laura would survive—she *had* to. She said she would wait for him. It was a long time to wait—until he could manage to get out here again. It might be years, but he would do it.

Vaguely, as if in a dream, he heard a voice in the cubicle. It was Reeves over the intercom. He seemed to have difficulty getting words out—as though he had just suffered some great mental shock.

"I—I've just discovered something Danner's dossier didn't mention—

He's also suffering from *psychoanalyphobia—the fear of psychoanalysis!*"

Reeves was silent a moment, and Leaton could hear the heavy breathing of the rest of the men on the curcuit.

"We'll have to get back as best we can—you know what that may mean—" Reeves' voice suddenly sounded tired and weak. "Stand by for blast-off in one hour."

Leaton stood frozen. He might never get back now—

Terror drained him of all ability to think. How long he stood there he had no idea. The next thing he was aware of, was the dull boom and rumble of the tubes being ignited. It wouldn't be long now.

He stared down at the duffle and felt like giving it a kick. If it hadn't been for that, he wouldn't have fallen—

Then an idea occurred to him!

With a yank, he jerked open the bag and spilled its contents on the desk. He grabbed up his rifle and a handful of electron shells. Then he began blasting out a hole in the outer skin of the ship.

HE DIDN'T allow himself to think of failure. All his attention was concentrated on knocking out a hole big enough to drop to the ground through. The ship itself wouldn't be seriously damaged, all cubicles being air-tight.

Slowly the hole grew bigger, but also the drone of the rockets grew heavier. Sweat broke out on his forehead as he felt a tremble run through the ship. He knew what that meant. Peak warm-up had been reached; they were all set for the blast off. He was counting on the space suit he still wore to protect him from the tubes. He would have to protect his head as best he could.

There was a roar and he felt the sudden tug of the ship lifting—slowly at first, then faster. His heart sank.

By S. A. Lombino

SILENT PARTNER



They told Jon he needed a companion, out there on the satellite, and he'd agreed. But he hadn't known about Marcia at the time .

HE HATED her. The hatred bubbled up inside of him like a black, evil brew clouding his senses. "Must you sit there?" he asked impatiently.

"Not if you don't want me to," she answered. She turned her head slightly, her finely-molded features catching the glare of the overhead fluorescents.

"Well I don't want you to, damnit. Find someplace else to mope; go out in the kitchen, go upstairs, go anywhere. Only leave me alone. Just leave me alone, that's all." His voice trailed off, and he stared at her, his emotions raging in his blood-stream. "Did you hear me?" he shouted.

"I heard you, Jon."

"Well then—give me some damned sign; you sit there like an Egyptian mummy, and I'm supposed to know what's going on inside that head of yours."

"I'm sorry, Jon." Her face was expressionless, her voice even.

"Oh, just get out," he mumbled.

She rose smoothly, her clothes

clinging to the molded curves of her body. Without a word, she crossed the room, her hips swinging rhythmically. His eyes followed her across the room, followed the undulating rhythm beneath the tunic, followed the hard curving lines of her figure. He bit his lip and turned away from her furiously.

He kept slapping his clenched fist into the open palm of his other hand as he paced back and forth, back and forth. He heard her close the door, gently, heard the sound of her feet on the steps leading to the upper level of the satellite.

He stopped pacing abruptly, walked to a button in the wall and pressed it. The heavy plasteel shield around the thinner lucitore dome swung backward noiselessly. The black velvet of space suddenly appeared, peppered with a million suns that gnawed at the blackness with fiery beaks. Far off in the distance, like a bluish ball in the sky, hung Earth. The moon was a faint white pebble clinging against the blackness.

The old nostalgia swept over him again, and he felt the uncontrollable urge to cry. As if expecting her to come back again, he glanced over his shoulder nervously. No, she was probably up there watching the video-cast. He caught himself abruptly, remembering that she didn't enjoy the shows the way he did.

He could remember Earth so clearly, so very clearly. It was Spring-time there now, wasn't it? He could almost smell the bursting buds, almost hear the sound of bands on the pavilion, see the young lovers walking hand in...

Lovers!

THE THOUGHT sent a sickening lurch through his body. One year on a satellite; one year with her. Eight months gone and four to go. One year.

"You'll need someone," they had said, "someone to make it easier for you."

He agreed readily; he hadn't thought apprenticeship on a relay station was necessary in the first place. But he had learned that it was part of the curriculum, required of all potential pilots. All right, he'd put in his lousy year, make the best of it, stick it out; a year wasn't really such a very long time.

Marcia was her name. They had introduced her to him quite formally, and he had marvelled at her flawless beauty. *Perhaps it won't be so bad, after all*, he'd thought. *Perhaps she will help me. Perhaps it will be easier.*

He thudded his fist against the unyielding metal skin of the satellite.

"It's not easier," he shouted out loud. Seeing her every day, always there, coldly beautiful, coldly distant, untouchable. Why did it have to be a woman? Why couldn't they have supplied a man? Didn't they know it would come to this? Couldn't they have foreseen?

Oh, hell, he knew what they would say. "A woman will keep the place

clean; tidy up for you; cook your meals, provide a more natural atmosphere."

Natural, hell. Some of the best chefs in the universe were men; some of the best porters, too, he mused wryly. He suspected something more basic in their motives. He knew they weren't being consciously sadistic, but he surmised this was all part of the course—cooping him up here for a year with a woman like her. If he got through this, he could get through any perils space offered. A woman like her could...

Damn it, there he went again, thinking like that about her.

"Marcia," he shouted.

He waited patiently, his fingers drumming against the metal walls. "Marcia!"

He heard her footsteps on the stairs again. Quietly, he walked across the room, pressing the button that closed the plasteel shutter, blocking out the stars...and Earth.

The door opened and she came into the room, bringing beauty with her. Her face was a blank mask, emotionless. "Sit down," he said; "sit down, Marcia."

"Thank you," she said politely. She walked across the room, his eyes hungrily watching her every movement. She sat on the foam couch, tucking her skirt below her knees.

"Mind if I mix a drink?" he asked.

"Go right ahead," she said; "you know you don't have to ask me."

He walked to the large liquor cabinet, thoughtfully stocked with the finest Earth could supply. "I think I'll have Scotch tonight," he said to her. "What did I have last night, Marcia?"

"Scotch," she said. Her voice was bored. "Scotch and soda."

He grinned at her infallible memory. *Perfect little woman*, he thought, *just perfect*. "Scotch, was it? Then maybe I'll try the brandy this time."

HE POURED a little into a tumbler, held it in his hands for

a while. "You're supposed to warm it with your hands, aren't you?" he asked her.

"I don't know."

"You're too unsophisticated, Marcia. A more experienced woman would pretend knowledge, even where it was lacking. A more experienced woman would have said, 'Yes, you are supposed to warm it in your hands.' That's one of your failings, Marcia."

"I'm not an experienced woman," she said.

"I know." He tossed off the brandy, felt it burning its way down to the pit of his stomach. "How well I know."

He lifted the bottle, poured another tumblerful. "Pity you don't drink, Marcia; pity."

She said nothing; she sat there watching him, calmly poised.

"You have no vices, have you, Marcia?"

"None," she said.

"How does it feel? How does it feel to be so damned superior?"

"Jon..."

"Oh, shut up!"

She clamped her jaws together, watched him silently down the second tumblerful of brandy.

"Go ahead," he taunted, "say it."

"Say what, Jon?"

"Say I drink too much; go on. That's your job here, you know. You're supposed to help me. What the hell else are you good for?"

"You drink too much, Jon."

"That's it, that's much better. That's being the little helpmate. That's what you're for, isn't it?"

"If you say so."

"What else?" he asked. He leaned against the cabinet, poured another brandy. "I can check all the instruments here by myself, can't I?"

"Yes."

"You don't know anything at all about the instruments, do you?"

"No."

"And I can handle radio contact, and beaming, and all the rest of the garbage alone, can't I?"

"Yes."

"So..." He downed the brandy, gasped loudly. "So you're here as a companion, aren't you? A lovely female companion."

"Yes."

"As cold as an iceberg; as un-touchable as..."

"Jon, please."

"Oh, shut up and listen. A good helpmate has to know when to listen, Marcia; remember that."

"I'll remember."

"Good, very good." He was feeling quite dizzy now. He leaned back against the liquor cabinet and lifted the bottle to his lips. "Save you the trouble of washing any glasses, Marcia. Considerate, don't you think?" He drank greedily, trying to still the raging tide in his blood.

He put the bottle down, reeled fumbly for a grip on the cabinet. He saw her rise, saw the pinkness of her flashing legs as she got to her feet. "Sit down," he commanded, his hand before him like a traffic cop. "I'm all right; don't need no help from you. I'm all right."

He tried to focus her, saw only a blurred figure sitting patiently on the couch. He started moving toward her, almost falling. When he reached the couch, he wrapped his arms about her, sensed the unyielding coldness of her. "Marcia, Marcia," he pleaded.

"Jon. This isn't good for you," she said.

"Marcia," he moaned, "I'm drunk. Take me up to bed, Marcia; take me up to bed." He collapsed numbly on the couch. "Tired," he mumbled. "Just tired. Tired."

He felt her arms go around him, and in his haze they felt warm and tender. She was helping him up the steps, and he suddenly wanted to sing. The age-old ditty sprang to his lips, the words the men at the Academy had put to the tune of *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean*.

Your ears will grow used to the silence,

*Your eyes will grow used to the
sights.
For you are a satellite jockey,
And boredom will fill all your nights.*

He laughed uproariously at his own predicament, then swung into the chorus.

*Boredom,
Boredom,
Yes, boredom will fill all your nights,
your nights.
Boredom...*

She helped him upstairs, and he felt her fingers unloosening his tunic, yanking off his shoes. She pulled back the sheets and he sank back against the foam. He heard a faint rustle as she covered him. And then she moved silently out of the room.

IN THE morning, he made up his mind.

They sat opposite each other at the breakfast table. She watched as he lifted his coffee cup. He sipped a little, put it down. "Hot," he said.

"I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Marcia; it'll cool." He looked at her slyly, wondering if his plans were evident in his more subdued speech. He hadn't been so nice to her in a long while.

"I've changed in these eight months, haven't I?" he asked.

"I..."

"You needn't answer," he said; "I know I have." He picked up the cup again, sipped at it. "That's better." He smiled across the table at her. "What about you?"

"I don't understand," she said.

"Have you changed?"

"Don't be silly, Jon."

"Good old Marcia; nerves of steel." He smiled, then chuckled openly. "I'm calling it quits, Marcia; I'm beaming Earth right after breakfast; I'm throwing in the towel."

She didn't say anything.

"Well? What do you think of that?"

"It's your decision; I have nothing to say."

"Even though it's because of you?"

Again she was silent.

"You'd drive any man mad, Marcia. Eight months of you. Eight months of watching you, of being near you, of want..."

"Jon!"

"Amazing how I always get the same response from you whenever I touch on that subject. Bang, the door snaps shut."

"You know I..."

"Yes, yes, I know." He rose from the table. "I'm beaming Earth. You clean up here; we're going to have company soon."

He started toward the radio shack, and he mumbled, "*I hope.*" Behind him, he heard Marcia puttering at the table, clearing away his dishes. Again the hatred boiled up inside him—or was it hatred? For an agonizing moment, he wondered if it were love. He put the thought out of his head, pushed it all the way back, out of his mind. He opened the door to the radio shack, went in, and started warming up the transmitter.

In a little while, he raised Earth.

"Blue Base, this is Blue One," he intoned. "Come in, blue Base."

He listened, and beneath the abominable static, he heard, "This is Blue Base; go ahead, Blue One."

He said the words clearly and distinctly, his mouth close to the microphone. "I want a woman."

There was a long silence on the other end, longer than the normal time lapse necessary for a voice to travel these many miles. Then: "Say again, Blue One. Say again."

He said it louder this time. "I want a woman; I want one soon."

Another pause. "Hold on, Blue One."

He waited, waited while a superior was being called. Finally, as he suspected, a new voice came onto the line. "This is Commodore Jackson. That you, Anders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, what's all this about?"

"I want a woman, sir; request that you send one up along with a preacher."

"This is all highly irregular, Anders."

"I know, sir."

"What's wrong with Marcia? Isn't she..."

"I want a mate, a wife; Marcia won't do."

"Mmm. This may mean a washout—you know that, Anders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's up to you, and it'll have to be decided, later, by a court. You'll still have to put in your remaining four months, anyway."

"Yes, sir. I know."

"Well..." The Commodore paused. "Did you...ah...did you have any one particular in mind?"

"Anyone, sir; you have my psychographs. I understand Central System is quite adept at this sort of thing."

"Mmm. Just a moment, Anders."

HE WAITED impatiently. Finally, the Commodore's voice came back to him. "There's a packet going by there in a few days."

"Good," he said. "Sir," he added.

"Mind you, Anders, you're quite fortunate. This is the first ship passing anywhere nearby for the past six months. Probably be the last one for the next six months. If it weren't for chance, we'd have to deny your request. Aren't many ships anxious to flirt with the meteors in that sector?"

"I understand, sir."

"Well, we'll see what we can do; and mind you—this may mean washout."

"I understand, sir."

"That all, Anders?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right then; everything else shipshape?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Good. Sure you don't want to reconsider?"

"No, sir."

"All right then; I'm switching off, Anders."

"Roger," he said. The static ended abruptly, and he ripped the phones from his head. He switched off the transmitter hurriedly, and then ran from the radio shack.

Marcia was busy in the living room, emptying ash trays, silently moving around the room.

A small smile lifted the corners of his mouth. "You'll be happy to know," he said, "that I'm going to be married."

"Oh?" she said.

"Yes."

"I'm very happy for you," she said; then she went on with her cleaning.

TWO DAYS later, he spotted the packet in the powerful telescope jutting out of the dome. "They're coming," he said excitedly. Marcia stood by him silently, more reticent than usual.

"My bride is on that ship," he told her, deriving a strange satisfaction from repeating the news to her. He didn't for a moment believe it made any difference to her whatever, but he enjoyed it anyway. "When you see her, you'll know what a woman really is." He smiled broadly, his eye on the approaching ship, his other eye squinted tightly shut as he swung the huge telescope.

It shot across the blackness of the sky like a silver slug, a blue-orange exhaust leaping from its jets. Closer, closer it streaked, and the grin on his face grew wider as he watched the brilliant exhaust.

And then the grin froze on his face. With the ship large in the eyepiece of the telescope, so large that he could see the rivets in its hull, a new tail of fire caught his eye. It swung in from the right, searing across the sky in molten fury, overtaking the orange-blue exhaust of the packet.

"Meteor!" he shouted, as if the

ship could hear him. His eyes widened as the meteor swung toward the ship, its fiery tail blazing the sky. Surely they had seen it, surely their radar had...

"Good Lord!" he cried, his fingers tightening against the knob on the telescope. He could almost hear the sickening crunch of metal as molten fire struck steel. The packet erupted amidships, steel splintering outward. Two figures were blasted out of the ship as the rent released the pressure inside. For an instant, he saw the girl who would have been his bride swim into focus, clutching at the void, her mouth open, her eyes wide in terror. And then she was nothing but a bloated glob, floating in the blackness, not resembling a woman anymore, not looking at all like the real woman he had so needed.

He turned away from the eyepiece, revulsion gripping his stomach. His eye caught Marcia, and the hatred seethed inside him.

"Four more months," he shouted.

"Four more months with you! You, you, you!"

He rushed blindly about the room, his eyes searching, and finally he found what he wanted. The axe hung on the wall, securely resting on two metal brackets. He seized it in tight fingers.

She stood motionless as the axe split into her plastic skull, sending the pink, flesh-like covering flying off in large hunks. He kept chopping, revealing the wires inside her head, the tubes that glowed feebly and then died. He hacked away insanely, hacked until she dropped into a tangled mass of wire, metal, and plastic at his feet.

He was sweating profusely when he finally dropped the axe. He fell to his knees then, and his fingers sought the synthetic strands of silk that had been woven into the top of her skull, black and shiny.

He stroked the silk, and whispered hoarsely, "Marcia, Marcia."

★

It Says Here

princess. Let the title be changed to 'Naked Princess'!"

And Lowndes lifted up his head, saying, "Get thee behind me, for, first of all, we had best change the 'naked' to 'nude'; and I think me that either word on the cover would indeed *zing*—aye, and so roundly that the Post Office would appear in wrath upon us."

So the voice replied, cunningly, "Then, surely, the word 'Princess' can appear in the title, for is not the heroine a princess? And is she not something of a rogue? Let the title, then, be 'Rogue Princess'!"

Then Lowndes turned unto his memory, searching to see if therein he could find any science-fiction cover within the years which had borne the title, "Rogue Princess", but none could he discover. Thus, before his eyes, did the title *zing*, and great was the deceit played upon him by the voice, which seduced him with mighty seducements, keeping his eyes away from the bookshelf at the other side of the office, where could be found a novel by this same Sprague, whereof the title was "Rogue Queen". Nor did the *zing* depart, and Lowndes discover how he had thus been betrayed, until time had passed, and deadlines had come and gone, and it was

(Continued From Page 10)

too late to make any change in the titles on the cover....

The idea of a labelling-system seems to me to be a good one, and I'm inclined to believe that, in most cases, authors would be delighted to see others take up their backgrounds for further development. I know, for example, that Nelson Bond wrote a story using Manley Wade Wellman's petal-headed Martians—with their inventor's enthusiastic approval and consent.... Sherman's a new name, but not a new writer—he's appeared in Westerns previously under different names.

DOCUMENTATION

Dear Bob:

As Mr. Adams (SFQ May '52, p. 114) in criticising my article "*The Wisdom of the Ancients*", fails to cite any specific errors, I am somewhat at a loss to reply to him. If I had undertaken to tell all about Egypt, and to mention all the authorities thereon, as he implies I should have done, the result would have been a whopping

big book—not the short magazine article for which there happened to have been a market. Does he mean that he would like a bibliography of the books that I consulted in preparing my piece? *Kuwayyis katir, Effendi*, here goes:

Ammianus Marcellinus: *Roman History*, Lon.: 1862.

J. Baikie: *A History of Egypt*, Lon.: 1929.

—: *Wonder Tales of the Ancient World*, NY: 1925.

F. A. P. Barnard: *The Imaginary Metrological System of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh*, NY: 1884.

J. Bonwick: *Pyramid Facts & Fancies*, Lon.: 1877.

L. Borchardt: *Gegen die Zahlenmystik an der grossen Pyramide bei Gizeh*, Berlin: 1922.

R. Boswell: *Propbels & Portents*, NY: 1942.

J. H. Breasted: *The Conquest of Civilization*, NY: 1938.

E. A. W. Budge: *Egyptian Magic*, Lon.: 1901.

S. Casson: *The Discovery of Man*, NY: 1939.

—: *Progress of Archaeology*, Lon.: 1934.

B. Corbin: *The Great Pyramid*, Guthrie, Okla.: 1935.

W. C. Dampier: *A History of Science*, NY: 1942.

D. Davidson & H. Aldersmith: *The Great Pyramid*, Lon.: 1924.

C. C. Dobson: *The Mystery of the Great Pyramid*, Lon.: 1927.

W. Durant: *Our Oriental Heritage*, NY: 1935.

M. Edgar: *The Great Pyramid*, Glasgow: 1924.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, s. v. *Alchemy, Egypt, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Pyramid*, etc.

H. J. Forman: *The Study of Prophecy*, NY: 1936.

H. J. Gardner: 1940 *What's Next*, LA: 1939.

S. R. K. Glanville: *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxf.: 1942.

Herodotos of Halikarnassos: *The Histories* (several editions).

Iamblichos of Chalkis: *Theurgia or the Egyptian Mysteries*, Lon.: 1911.

C. S. Knight: *The Mystery & Prophecy of the Great Pyramid*, San Jose: 1933.

Kosmas Indikopleustes: *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*, Lon.: 1897.

A. Le Plongeon: *Queen, Moo & the Egyptian Sphinx*, Lon.: 1896.

H. S. Lewis: *The Symbolic Prophecy of the Great Pyramid*, San Jose: 1936.

J. P. Lough: *In the Beginning God Created* . . . NY: 1936.

R. V. D. Magoffin & E. C. Davis: *The Romance of Archaeology*, Garden City: 1928.

Manetho (fragments), Loeb Classics.

G. C. C. Maspero: *The Dawn of Civilization*, NY: 1894.

W. M. F. Petrie: *Seventy Years in Archaeology*, Lon.: 1931.

Lord Raglan: *How Came Civilization?* Lon.: 1939.

G. E. Smith: *The Ancient Egyptians*, Lon.: 1923.

—: *In the Beginning*, NY: 1928.

—: *The Migrations of Early Culture*, Manchester: 1929.

—: *Culture (The Diffusionist Controversy)*, NY: 1927.

C. P. Smyth: *Life & Work at the Great Pyramid*, Edinburgh: 1867.

—: *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid*, Lon.: 1877.

L. Spence: *Myths & Legends of Ancient Egypt*, Lon.: 1922.

W. L. Straub: *Anglo-Israel Mysteries Unmasked*, Omaha: 1937.

L. Thorndike: *A History of Magic & Experimental Science*, NY: 1923.

As for my alleged superficiality, that's relative. I am, of course, not a professional Egyptologist but a popularizer and historian of science; and therefore my knowledge of any particular branch of science is necessarily less profound than that of a specialist who had spent his life working in that field. But I use the best sources I can find, and I never deliberately overlook a source, as I suspect my cultist critics of doing.

L. Sprague de Camp,
Wallingford, Penn.

(Quite impressive Sprague; now your objectors will have something to go on, if they still want to argue the case.)

A VOTE FOR NOVELS

Dear Sirs:

I would definitely like to have more stories the length of "Three Worlds In Shadow". The story, although not a classic, is the kind that I would like to read more of. It was the first time that any s.f. story gave me a taste of what one would expect from looking at the cover.

I had difficulty in rating the rest of the stories, except for "Communicado". It was the only one which came near getting my "x" on the voting-list. The theory isn't new, and although interesting, it was a little too abstract; perhaps I should say the method of presentation doesn't lend itself to story-writing. I find it hard to appreciate a story that ends where it started, without achieving any definite purpose.

As far as the cover is concerned, I like them the way they are. When I go into a magazine store, I can spot the science-fiction books and buy my favorites without taking forever. The artwork is fine. The girls are the kind I would like to know more of, and the kind I enjoy reading about.

I like stories which are based on adventure with some science mixed in, as opposed to theories with a plot added as the extra.

As for the series suggested by Mr. Wiggonsky, I think it would be too restrictive. The percentage of readers interested in the field of evolution would not warrant using such a large chunk of the book over a period of time. I think that your fine magazine covers most of the branches of science and a wide field of interest, and I would like to keep it that way.

Bruce Dawson,
Route 4, Box, 217,
Morgantown, W. Va.

(So far, the suggested series on evolutionary subjects does not seem to have met with much response. Perhaps it's best to let such stories come as they will.)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Dear Editor:

The time has come for all readers and enthusiasts of science-fiction to realize that an event of national importance is taking place in San Diego this year.

Namely, on June 28**th** and 29**th**—The SouWestercon.

This will be a convention in the world-famous U.S. Grant Hotel (any taxi-driver or cop will tell you where), and the attendance fee will be less than you would normally expect.

The San Diego Science-Fantasy Society, sponsor of this epoch-making convocation, invites not only dyed-in-the-corn science-

fiction readers to attend, but promises that a number of outstanding figures in the field of science-fiction writing will be there.

Ray Bradbury will be the guest of honor.

Anthony Boucher, Kris Neville, Stuart Palmer, Robert Heinlein, Frederic Brown, Henry Kuttner, Cleve Cartmill, C. L. Moore, Richard Matheson, L. Major Reynolds, A. E. Van Vogt, and many other professionals, will preside and participate in panel discussions of interest to you.

In order to assure your reservation, send one dollar to The SouWestercon Committee, 3522 Union, San Diego 1, California.

We want you to know that your dollar will be your key to 48 hours of the best entertainment that any science-fiction convention has ever produced.

Coral Smith, Secretary
The SouWestercon Committee

(We'd like to see a photo of this epoch, as early as possible after you've made it.

NO REGRETS

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Thought I'd comment on the *May Science Fiction Quarterly*, since it was a fine issue. Until now, I haven't read your magazine regularly, due to its repellent covers. The cover on the May issue, however, was good enough to make me look inside. What I saw there attracted me to the extent that I bought it. I certainly don't regret it.

"The Shining City" was one of the best novels I have read in a long time. If your lead stories have all been this good, I have really missed something.

Incidentally, in your extra blurb, you said that this story was by a name unknown. Actually, the name of Rena M. Vale has been before the public for quite a while, as author of a forthcoming book, "Beyond These Walls", a long novel which has been extensively advertised. If this is as good as "The Shining City", we can look forward to a real reading treat.

The novelets weren't outstanding, but both of them had their merits. Both were certainly better than the average novelet.

"The Luckiest Man Alive" was a good new twist to an old idea. I enjoyed it.

"We, the People" was, next to "The Shining City", the best story in the maga-



zine. The last paragraph was really a surprise. By the way, I notice that one political custom changed throughout the years in this tale. The Democrats held their convention before the Republicans did.

The best letters? It's pretty close, but I'll give the nod to Greenwood, Sherman, and Edelson.

Keep up the good work in both *Science Fiction Quarterly* and *Future*.

Lonny Lundis,
306 Elmore,
Park Ridge, Illinois.

(I had heard of Rena Vale's book, but since it hadn't appeared at the time, I think her name was still pretty much in the "unknown" class—and certainly a newcomer to science-fiction magazines, so far as I knew. . . . Gad, I completely overlooked the order-change in Democratic and Republican National Conventions in "We, the People", and must confess that—at this moment—I'm not sure whether it was a mistake. Perhaps Mr. Moore, or some better-informed reader, can set us straight. I know, of course, that the Republicans preceded the Democrats in 1948, but prior to that...)

DISSENT ON STANDARDIZATION

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Mr. Mitchell's letter in the February issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* proposed a highly-impractical idea.

In his first few paragraphs, he tells of blasters, rocket guns, and the instrument-panels of spaceships. If they were all the same, as he wishes them to be, there could be no first ship to the moon, no first interstellar ship. Some stories take ideas such as these and use them for the basis of stories.

One thing I agree with is his idea of how Venus and Mars are visualized as nations, and not as planets.

Then about "Martians", and "Venusians", and "Arabs" and "Indians". Unless one has met an "Indian" or "Arab", he only knows of them by pictures and drawings. The same way with "Martians" and "Venusians". The author gives a description, and maybe there is an illustration of the "Martian", or "Venusian". Then you have the same sensation as with the "Arab" or "Indian". It all depends on the author's ability.

And he wants *Science Fiction Quarterly* to do the whole job alone. Maybe I should tell him that there are other science-fiction magazines.

If such a plan were accepted, it would result in sheer boredom for any reader. Always the same setting, the same places. Of course, there would be time-travel and fantasy. But, after a few months, it would be awfully boring.

Now to say something about your magazine. "Three Worlds in Shadow": wonderful space-opera. "Rogue Princess": good writing, nice plot. I enjoyed it very much.

The others were good, but not outstanding.

"Communicado", by Katherine Maclean, was very interesting. But in her article, she says that telepathy, psi, and ESP have no time-dimension. She stands at point X in the center and sees both ways from A-Z. I am speaking figuratively.

She mentions scenes from the past. But what about the future?

One last word about the illustrations. They are good. How about giving credit to the interior artists on the contents page?

B. A. Sodek,
1415 S. Marsalis,
Dallas, Texas.

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(Look at the contents page again, Mr. Sodek, and you'll see that we *do* give credit to the interior illustrators, in a line just above the editor's name.)



OPPORTUNITY LOST

Dear Editor:

Tell your Mr. Sherman that the number is now three, at least, because I thought "Intervention" the most memorable story in your February issue. It wasn't as smoothly-written as De Camp's "Rogue Princess", nor as full of action as "Three Worlds in Shadow", but the story certainly held my interest and had some thought in it, too. Alas, that I missed the opportunity to vote before it was too late—but I never dreamed that other readers wouldn't care much for it.

Bear with me while I take time out to pity those who didn't get anything out of it.

This time, I'm taking no chances. For my two bits, there are two stories in the May issue which deserve top honors—"The Shining City" and "We, the People"—and I pray this vote won't go astray or that they'll emerge on the bottom of the ratings, for lack of good intentions put down onto paper and mailed in.

I found the Blish article interesting, but also quite irritating, since it looks as if he had barely started on his subject before he came to a stop. I'd say, give him a "number 2" vote for what he has, and a big red "X" for not going on with it, only it might not be the author's fault; perhaps he was held down to that length. If

[Turn To Page 124]

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

that was the reason, you ought to let him go on with the subject for at least one more article, if not several. It's one of the most interesting subjects I've ever seen in science-fiction articles.

Glen Monroe,
Bronx, New York

(We did set the limits on articles in the Blish series, but I'm wide-open for follow-ups or additions where the readers would like to see them.)

YOU'RE WELCOME

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Just a note of appreciation for your recommendation of the del Rey book, "It's Your Atomic Age". I had never heard of it before, and all the other books on the subject that I had seen looked much too complicated. This one was just right. Maybe I'll try the one by Campbell, now, if I can brace myself to tackle the technical parts.

Do you know if "It's Your Atomic Age" is going to appear in pocketbook form? It really should, and I think that it would be very profitable to whomever brought it out. So darn many of these scientific works "for the layman" turn out to be for "layman" with PhD's and all kinds of experience with reading diagrams, charts, formulae, and so on. It's tough on the "lay" layman who can't make anything out of such material.

Murray King,
Greenwich, Conn.

(I haven't heard about any pocketbook edition of "It's Your Atomic Age", but will be delighted to pass on the good word, if and when it comes about.

Shortness of space, and closeness of deadline, lays down the law and says we'll have to stop here. So...my continued thanks to those who wrote in and have not seen publication. Your votes will be included in those final figures which appear in "The Reckoning", nonetheless.

And...a word to the wise for those who, like Mr. Monroe, may have been saddened by seeing a story they liked come out in last place, or way down toward the bottom—or irritated by seeing a story they thought deplorable wearing laurels in the ratings: you can't depend on other readers to mirror your reactions. So if you want the final results to include your opinions, send in your letter, post-card, or preference-coupon as early as possible. Selah. RWL)

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

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(Continued From Page 112)

He threw down the rifle and started through the hole, then drew back. Already the ship was too high up.

He was trapped after all!

He collapsed on the floor and his head struck something soft. It was the parachute; there was still a chance.

He jumped up and buckled it on, then dived through the hole—and stuck fast.

Wind and waves of heat screamed furiously around his body and head. Frantically he turned and twisted, trying to pull the rest of his body with the chute through the hole. The lack of oxygen was causing his efforts to grow weaker and weaker. Shiny black spots danced before his eyes. Then he felt himself falling into blackness...



A blinding wave of heat brought him around— He had fallen astern of the rocket tubes. Twisting and turning, he saw them flash into the darkness above him.

[Turn To Page 128]

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Then he yanked the ripcord and fainted.

It was a long time before he regained consciousness, and when he did, he found himself dangling from his harness about eight feet above ground. The rest of the chute was caught in a tree.

He unbuckled the straps and slipped to the ground. Except for the singed flesh of his face and neck, he seemed in working order.

He wasn't far from the rim of the valley, and after an hour's search he found the tunnel running through the wall of yellow and purple jungle.

Suddenly the thought struck him that Reeves might have been right—maybe he had actually cracked up. What if there wasn't any Laura waiting for him?

To be here alone forever on this world—only himself. The thought made him sick.

He was nearly at the tunnel's exit when he saw her running towards him. They each shouted the other's name. Then she started to waver and fade from his sight. His heart almost stopped—until he realized that it was only tears blocking his vision.



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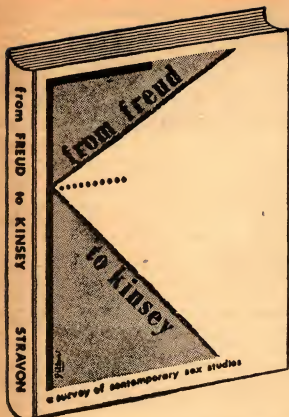
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— The Editor



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THE RECKONING

A Report on Your
Votes and Comments

Feeling ran high on our May issue, particularly between the applause and boos directed at the Vale and Price stories; since hardly anyone who liked one cheered the other, I was somewhat surprised to find them coming out in an exact tie. Interestingly enough, those who liked Price, also went all out for the Moore satire, while the Vale fanciers, didn't fancy Moore at all. No one escaped unscathed in the fracas, and you'll see that another pair of items also ended up in exact tie.

Here's how they stand at the finish:

1. The Shining City (Vale)	
When In Doubt, Mutate! (Price)	3.10
2. Extra-Secret Agent (Fyfe)	3.80
3. We, The People (Moore)	
Black Magic of Yesterday (Nelson)	4.10
4. Luckiest Man Alive (Morrison)	5.10
5. The Psychological Story (Blish)	6.22

There are 8 items on the coupon. A first-place vote will be noted on my sheet as "1"; a second-place "2", and so on. Any story marked "X", which specifies reader dislike, however, will be given 8 points and marked in red on my sheet. The total score for each story is then divided by the number of voters, and the quotient shows how the story came out.

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Number these in order of your preference, to the left of numeral; if you thought any of them bad, mark an "X" beside your dislikes.

- 1. All the Answers (Phillips)
- 2. The Seven Securities (Daly)
- 3. Wild Talents, Inc. (Lesser)
- 4. Goblin Planetoid (Garson)
- 5. The Mountain of Light (de Camp)
- 6. Welcome (Coppel)
- 7. Alien Restoration (Dye)
- 8. Silent Partner (Lombino)

Do you like the style of cover we have on this issue better than the kind we had before?

Who are your nominees for the three best letters in "It Says Here"?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

General Comment